Implementing Constructivist Approach into Online Course Designs in Distance Education Institute at Eastern Mediterranean University

Zehra Altınay

A project submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Professional Studies

National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships

Middlesex University

June 2010

ABSTRACT

Change and development in work settings for better working practice through projects has become essential. My work-based research has a significant role to contribute innovative practice of Distance Education Institute at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) by European University Association (EUA) norms. The research is aimed to investigate implementing constructivist approach into online course designs to develop learning and skills of the online students based on teamwork inspiration within the institute. Action research approach was employed in this qualitative research in order to provide insights on how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach. Training, in-depth interviews, documentary analysis, focus group, research diary and semi-structured interviews, self-report based on scaling were employed as data collection techniques to gather large amount of data from online tutors, students and core members of institute in relation to their collaborative efforts and experiences within the process. Furthermore, triangulated data was analyzed based on content analysis in this inductive journey. The results revealed that members and the tutors had no prior knowledge and experience on team work culture and the principles of constructivist approach into online course designs. As a result of this research process, team work culture was developed within the institute through participatory action research process. In this respect, implementing constructivist approach into online course designs based collaborative efforts and synergy power of the tutors developed reasoning, critical thinking, team work, communication skills of students. My project supported the quality improvements in online education practices within higher education institution.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My work based research project in Doctorate in Professional Studies Programme is prepared with my rigors as worker researcher, valuable guidance and support of my supervisor, Dr. David Officer, my consultants, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Işık Aybay, Prof. Dr, Aytekin İşman for better institutional practice in my work place. It is the enjoyable and at the same time helpful, brilliant journey that I have gained personal and professional development. I would like to thank to all my family, especially little Gülay and Hüseyin Altınay for their morale support for my academic success. Also, many thanks to institute members who showed good performance in participatory action research for better working practice.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Value of Contextualizing in My Work based Research Project

The "context" of the research is the critical success factor in carrying out work based projects. In order to understand the value of my project, the context of my research and the indicators of the cultural elements within society which affect the process need to be described. Contextualization is thus the first step in my work based project.

North Cyprus is only one part of a small island. It has a small developing community in which political, social and economical conflicts have arisen. These conflicts affect groups of individuals and decrease the morale of the community, which may result in resistance to change or innovation.

This in turn may create research difficulties. In a small community experiencing conflicts and instabilities in every aspects of life, education becomes a major tool to help this community to catch up with global standards and diffuse change and innovation.

Therefore, having seven international higher education institutions within such a small community is significant evidence that the community gives importance to education in order to compete according to global standards, expand economic growth and create employment.

Nowadays, there is a transformation process through action plans within the education system in order for it to be decentralized, democratic and global. In this process, higher education institutions have a great role play in activating change and innovation through action plans.

Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) was established in 1979 and is the oldest, largest, and most modern university on the island of Cyprus. It has students from sixty eight countries. This represents a diversity of cultures and is a major indicator of university policy. EMU seeks to develop international, global education policies based on regulations of the Higher Education Council in Turkey and the European University Association.

By its 25th year, EMU had graduated more than 16000 students, and currently has a student enrolment of approximately 15,000 and about 650 academic faculty and staff representing 35 nationalities.

Over the last 25 years, the campus infrastructure has been completed, and the University's grounds and facilities have grown to cover an area of 2200 acres, with buildings or enclosed spaces of 200,000m^2. These buildings include offices, classrooms, 90 laboratories for scientific and technological development, a modern library, health centre, and residence halls. The grounds also include excellent sports facilities.

The university's academic structure comprises 7 Faculties and 3 Schools, offering 28 four-year degree programs and 12 two-year associate degree programs at the undergraduate level, and 21 Master's and 13 Doctoral programs at the graduate level, for all of which diploma equivalency has been granted by the Ministries of Education of nine countries including Turkey.

Vision of EMU

The overall framing vision of EMU is one of commitment:

- Inspiring and educating students to become critical thinkers and autonomous individuals and personalities who will contribute to the

development of their societies on the basis of knowledge, ethical and professional responsibility, open-mindedness and personal integrity

- To promote cultural diversity and understanding both in the university and in society
- To contribute to the welfare of society and to sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in the region
- Playing a proactive role in the economic, social, and cultural development of the country by according the greatest priority to academic freedom and achieving the highest standards in education and research
- Being a democratic, transparent and autonomous institution.

Mission and Goals

The primary mission and goals are to increase distinction in teaching and research in our region by working actively in the following areas:

- To offer an academic environment that attracts and retains a highly qualified and diverse body of students and faculty regardless of their ideological, political, cultural and social backgrounds
- To create a stimulating intellectual environment that fosters values of respect, empathy, and ethical responsibility
- To encourage the participation of all the university's members and their organizations in the formulation of its short-term and long-term policies
- To provide an environment in which its members can pursue reasoned analysis and engage in critical thinking, and to make a conscious effort to encourage diversity while uniting the university's staff and students in pursuing the core values of a university: acquiring, creating, and applying knowledge

- To strive to be an institution which is transparent in its decisions and activities and which efficiently implements its programs and policies
- To develop close relationships with and provide knowledge, services and technology to all communities in the broader Mediterranean region without bias
- To make intense academic and social efforts to initiate, support and encourage solutions for environmental protection in Cyprus and in the broader Mediterranean region

Educational Philosophy

As an institution of higher learning, EMU'S purpose is to develop and establish a dynamic and creative international environment in which teaching and research are conducted at the highest standards.

Students are the foundation of a university. It is therefore essential for a philosophical shift to take place within the university, so that it becomes "student-centred." EMU is trying to develop new approaches to teaching and learning to serve an increasingly multicultural student population both inside and outside the classroom. This means that curricula need to be reconsidered carefully to consider whether an appropriate and effective education is being provided for students which will enable them to learn for themselves and compete in the modern world.

Global economic conditions demand that graduating students have attained not only a university degree and both specialized and general knowledge, but also high adaptation skills for the workplace and that they have become critical, democratic, self-confident and enthusiastic team players, educated in a variety of fields, with the potential to make positive contributions to the progress of society. Producing

competitive graduates who can meet the increasingly complex human resource needs of the 21st century is the responsibility of the university.

(http://www.emu.edu.tr/mevzuat/Eng-Rules05/administration/str-plan.doc)

1.2 Significance of My Work based Research Project and My Role

EMU is in the Bologna process and is being evaluated by the European Universities Association (EUA) in order to increase the quality in educational practice. The EUA reports on research activities and distance education practices, major tools through which the university can expand its capacity and realize the quality vision. The EUA reported on research activities at EMU as follows:

> "Research objectives should be part of the university strategic plan, thus defining the areas where research efforts should be concentrated. This would mean a clear set of priorities that should also take into account ***the modalities by which research cross fertilises the educational process.*** Such priorities should be based on ***EMU's own expertise, criteria and needs.*** The university can count on many distinguished professors who have gained experience abroad at top quality institutions and publish in high-level international journals. EMU should help develop synergies between the members of that pool of experts by fostering ***collaboration between different departments*** in order to engineer a critical mass in research focused on priority areas, whose strength could be reinforced by ***targeted recruitment of new research collaborators*** with the support of central administration in so far as these priorities underline the specificity of the institution's profile of activities" (EUA Report; 2007:29).

The report underlines the significance of my work based project within the institution in terms of departmental improvement. The EUA reports on distance education practices as follows:

> "Bologna process offers universities new opportunities to further genuine inter-faculty collaboration by developing new ***interdisciplinary Masters programmes***, a chance for building a community of belonging that EMU should not forego. Bologna also stresses the importance of ***distance education and e-learning***: using such tools for training could alleviate EMU's problems with the rapid increase of

> student numbers it has witnessed over the last few years. Such a policy could and should play a key role in developing a lifelong learning culture at EMU and in the region" (EUA Report; 2007:28).

In addition, the report underlined that the EMU Distance Education Institute needs to be improved as it could provide a competitive advantage to the university. In this respect, various research projects within the institute need to be undertaken to improve institutional practice (See Appendix A, p.166). Therefore, the EUA report confirmed that experts in the field of distance education who are the part of the institute as worker researchers need to conduct work based projects to drive forward change and innovation.

I am a senior instructor in both the Educational Sciences Department and Distance Education Institute. I have an educational background in distance education practice, am aware of work context problems, and as both worker and researcher in the field, I am developing my knowledge and experience through involvement in international projects, conferences and associations. This background should enable me to carry out my work based project in a strategic and efficient manner, as should a knowledge of how to conduct research within a small community. I believe I also bring to my dual role the ability to self-reflect, sensitivity to ethics, responsibility and intellectual flexibility within the research process, critical analysis and negotiation skills, and the ability to manage both learning and resources.

In this regard, I have put both effort and dedication into my project. The project is based on participatory action research to improve online course design based on a constructivist approach within the Distance Education Institute at EMU. This is a milestone for better working practice and a challenging research journey for both my personal and professional development.

1.3 Focus of My Work Based Research Project

To succeed in the competitive higher education market, there is a critical need to set strategies and action plans for reaching global standards based on the EUA's requirements. Improving institutional quality and performance helps establish a learning climate, which in turn will help in the development of niche services. Distance education practices provide a method which can expand learner capacity and help develop the quality standards that will provide a competitive advantage (Go´mez *et al.,* 2007).

Regarding global standards and competitiveness in higher education, institutions need to attend to organisational vision and integrate distance education practices into their mission as part of an innovative approach to strategy. Hence, change oriented action plans delivered through staff collaboration and commitment to develop institutional performance are essential.

As distance education institutes become measures of quality in the effort to gain competitive advantage in higher education, both pedagogical and organizational elements of distance education need to be considered. Commitment and collective understanding of the necessity for better working practice is a priority within distance education institutes if they are to meet a vision of quality improvements and competitiveness (McPherson and Nunes, 2006). In this respect, my project examines how the core members of a distance education institute act together in decision making processes to develop quality improvements in a higher education institution.

Kaya (2002) provides in-depth insights about applications in the Turkish higher education system and internationally of distance education practices. Distance education practices are a new phenomenon in the Turkish higher education system

with their dual mode systems in which both online and traditional programs are delivered.

Although dual mode universities in Turkey and North Cyprus integrate distance education practices, to date performance records and evidence of strategic planning which could demonstrate their success are not available.

The Distance Education Institute at EMU was established in 2000 and was the first institute in North Cyprus to introduce e-learning. The institute is attached to the Academic Affairs Office and is staffed by one director, one technical staff member and twenty three tutors providing online courses to students on and off the campus.

The institute delivers: 1. Online courses on campus, 2. A Two year diploma program in Information Management by distance learning. Five tutors for online courses, four tutors for online course support and fourteen tutors for the two-year distance education diploma program from different departments have served the institute to date.

In the 2008-2009 Academic Year, during which my work based project was conducted, the Institute provided only online courses within the campus. Because of legal and infrastructure problems within the institute, it could not provide the distance education diploma program or dynamic online course support courses. Although there were problems, there were also initiatives to open and develop new online courses within the campus and a masters degree diploma program in the Tourism and Hospitality Management Department.

Although the university had eight years of experience in dual mode, its distance education mode needed a change oriented action plan to meet the recommendations of the EUA report and bring working practice in line with the quality vision. The EUA report confirmed the worldwide reality that distance education institutes are milestones for change and innovation in higher education institutions. In addition, the report

indicated that work based projects have a major role to play in improving the institute in such aspects as commitment and collaboration within the Institute and in online course design.

Therefore, my work based project examines the role of team work in implementing a constructivist approach to online course design, and how this approach can improve online learning, impact on better working practice, increase institutional quality, meet the standards of EUA and thus contribute to better working practice in higher education more generally.

For higher education institutions to survive in a competitive world, customer focus and process management is crucial (Temponi, 2005). This process needs to simultaneously include people, equipment, supplies, materials, and producers. In this respect, assessing the relevance of programs in relation to customer focus and process management and within the framework of the European Higher Education Area is essential for innovation and quality improvements (Go´mez *et al.*, 2007).

Higher education institutions have thus had little choice but to propose various research projects in order to improve performance based on alternative strategies and plans to ensure quality and build a sustainable reputation.

Distance education has become a strategic innovation for gaining a competitive advantage and dual mode practice a method for not only improving quality but for market development and expansion. (McPherson and Nunes, 2006). My own institution has thus paid considerable attention to online education as a market strategy. This underlines the significance of my work based project for better working practice.

As student learning is the ultimate reason why higher education exists, it is important to know how to define, assess, and improve student learning in multiple ways. In this

respect, distance education has become a popular alternative strategy to develop quality. However, as online education and management systems are a new phenomenon, it is important to have a better understanding of what contributes to quality in online education.

Meyer (2002) provides in-depth insights into the quality that can be attained through faculty development within distance education. The role of the institution would be to provide commitment, a quality management process and a conceptual model of transformation in order to satisfy students' needs and empower learning.

In this respect, constructivist based course design and collaboration amongst faculty members are the critical factors to increase student learning and skills and thus increase the quality of the standards in online education programs (Meyer, 2002). In addition, willingness to commit, critical thinking and reflective practice as well as student, situational and educational system factors are important elements in enhancing learning in online education. Salmon (2002) argues that quality depends on good course design by tutors committed to a learner centred process. Salmon helps provide a theoretical framework for my project, underlining that when a group needs to work together for a reason, then more knowledge may be created through the interaction. She further emphasises that the commitment of stakeholders, internalizing the online process, technical skills and good communication are qualities that need to be developed in online projects. Edward (2001) also argues that course design is the critical quality indicator in online education and argues that constructivism is the most relevant approach to online courses. This approach, he proposes, involves students working in small groups, collaborating with others and taking the responsibility for learning in order to develop particular skills in line with the learning cycle. The need to promote interactive and collaborative learning within the social constructivist

paradigm is also discussed by Huang (2002), who also argues that constructivism is the most relevant approach to online education course design.

Committed instructors and faculty thus need to develop action plans to integrate constructivist principles into the delivery and design of courses. This research therefore encapsulates the commitment of the core members within my institute in integrating constructivist principles in courses design and delivery in practice.

Huang (2002) points out that since online learning has a different setting from the classroom, online educators require specific techniques and perceptions since the nature of the practice has a different philosophical and methodological base. He proposes a model for the integration of constructivism into course design in line with the adult learning approach. Neo (2005) provides a further theoretical strand of relevance to my research in his discussion of the relationship between the constructivist learning environment and the skills development of online students. Fisher and Baird (2005) also provide insights as to how course design provides a platform for social and collaborative learning opportunities for online students to develop their learning and transferable skills for their future.

My project thus aims to fill gaps in the extant literature by focusing on inclusion, collaboration and flexibility in online course design. Significantly, action research is used as a tool for change based on collaboration, commitment and inclusion of stakeholders to improve performance in working practice (Hubbard and Power, 1993, Marcinkoniene and Keka'le, 2007). For this reason, I have attempted to employ participatory action research in my research in order to develop working practice and teamwork within the Distance Education Institute and thus implement a constructivist approach to online course design that will help develop the learning and skills of online students.

In relation to the issues raised by the literature on this subject, the EUA report on the status of the Distance Education Institute and its research activities, the implementation of a constructivist approach to course design based on staff commitment thus seems not only a worthwhile research topic but crucial to better institutional practice.

1.4 Aim of the Work based Research Project

My work based project aims to investigate the role of teamwork in implementing a constructivist approach to course design in developing the learning and skills of the online students in Distance Education Institute at EMU. As stated, developing distance education practice is relevant both within the mission of the university, and within the context of the EUA report, which underlined the importance of distance education practice for the future of the university at a time when distance learning was still in its infancy at EMU.

In this respect, my research aims to:

1. Raising awareness on the need for collaboration and committed decision-making in course design and development.
2. Implementing a constructivist approach through training within a participatory action research framework.

Focusing on the role of the course design in developing the skills of online students and supporting institutional action plans through this specific research focus is intended to provide concrete benefit to the institution. The project covers the raising of awareness on collaboration, changes to course designs and the implementation of the constructivist approach through training and policy action.

In relation to change and development in my institution, participatory action research was employed to promote better working practice with a view to sharing the outcomes and benefits with other higher education institutions.

As far as the nature of inductive process in my work-based project is concerned, I attempted to use participatory action research, based on deliberate action for change and course development and design through the reflective, collaborative insights of the worker researcher and the participants (Schön, 1991).

During the research, the director of the institute, one technical staff member, thirteen online tutors and the director of the Tourism Department were to be involved in the process as core members. The proposed tutors brought a wide range of subject interests to the project. One tutor was from Economics, the director and five tutors were from Tourism, one tutor was from the Architecture Department, five from the English Preparatory School and one from the General Education Department.

Fourteen students from the seven online courses also became research participants. Throughout the inductive process, the action research cycle was adapted to my research. My project comprised eight strategic stages to complete the project efficiently and fulfil the expected outcomes.

1.5 Products and Outcomes of My Work-based Research Project

My work based project was intended to meet the needs of a wide target audience, including the Distance Education Institute, the Rector and Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, the Director, Tutors, Students and Technical Staff at EMU, and Higher Education Councils in North Cyprus and Turkey as well as other Higher Education Institutions.

The project was intended to deliver the following products and outcomes:

- Putting forward an action plan for quality improvements in distance education practice at Eastern Mediterranean University based on European Universities Association standards.
- Creating a teamwork culture within the institute
- Enhancing the pedagogical knowledge and experience of online tutors
- Producing a handbook on how to prepare and design online courses based on constructivist approach regarding team work culture for sharing with other higher education institutions
- Academic papers for conferences and publication about implementing a constructivist approach into online courses to develop the learning and skills of online students
- Disseminating the results of my project with the public, media and professionals.

My work-based research journey enabled me to gain insights into practitioner research for change within a work setting. In addition, it led to the development of an improved working relationship with other staff based on the innovation of a new approach within the institute and to the planning and implementing of action to meet the needs of the target audiences. Furthermore, it enhanced my practical research experience and developed my in-depth knowledge of project management and the distance education field. It also enabled me learn how to plan and develop a new paradigm in innovative and strategic ways.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES, TERMS OF REFERENCE, RESEARCH STATEMENTS AND QUESTIONS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter of my work based research project includes three sections: Aim and objectives, terms of reference, research statement and questions. The first part examines the aim of my project and its specific objectives. The second part reviews the previous conceptual and empirical research on project teams and the implementation of a constructivist approach to course designs in an online context.

This provides the theoretical framework for my project. It starts by reviewing team work in decision making processes for course design. It then addresses different authors' concerns about the constructivist approach to learning. The literature review then pulls these arguments together and emphasises the need to undertake a constructivist approach in online education for the purposes of my project.

In this respect, a review of skills development of students in an constructivist-orientated online context is carried out. Particular attention is given to which skills are fostered and limited by the constructivist approach in an online context. In addition, the discussion section provides a summary of relevant literature. In the final part of the chapter, the research statement and main research questions are specified in terms of importance.

2.2 Aim and Objectives of My Work based Research Project

The EUA report on distance education at EMU stated that practice needed to be improved through concrete action plans. This required consideration not only of the EUA report, but global standards in distance education practice, and the quality driven

policies within the mission, vision and educational philosophy of the university. Therefore, the main aim of my research project was to promote an action plan based on these factors that would lead to the implementation of a constructivist approach to online course design and develop the learning and skills of online students through a culture of teamwork.

In achieving success, I had a number of advantages, including my role, my in-depth knowledge and experience in the field, networking and communication ability with core organisation members, and a commitment to the development of the Distance Education Institute.

As mentioned, my project included raising awareness on collaboration, course design and the implementation of a constructivist approach within a participatory action research framework. In specific, my research aimed to accomplish the following objectives:

- To create the awareness on the part of Distance Education Institute members regarding team work for decision making about course design
- To create awareness about the constructivist approach in online education through training
- To integrate the constructivist approach into online course design to develop the critical thinking skills of online students
- To contribute to organizational change in terms of instructional design within distance education practices.

These specific objectives were to be realized through my initiative and strategic efforts in the Distance Education Institute at EMU through a concrete action plan to develop a constructivist approach to online course design that would develop in parallel the team work culture required for sustainable quality development.

2.3 Term of Reference

The literature review section of this chapter will include a critical analysis of the literature in relation to: teamwork culture in working practice; the constructivist approach in online course design; the role of the constructivist approach to course design in developing the learning and skills of students; and a discussion that draws on this critical engagement with literature to develop a theoretical and conceptual map for my own research project.

Team Work Culture in Working Practices

In educational settings, decentralization is seen as a major policy to increase efficiency, flexibility, accountability, and responsiveness to innovation, change and development. This requires practitioners in higher education to be involved in collaborative processes while making important decisions (Ho, 2006; Lam, 2005).

It is further stressed that leaders proposing change need to involve others in decision making for a number of reasons. These include obtaining necessary information, coming up with creative alternatives, gaining commitment and training future generations of decision makers through a sound process (Schwarber, 2005). Shared decision making is thus an essential step in productive organizational development and this requires a debate on the importance of teamwork and commitment within shared decision making processes to foster new practices (Ho, 2006).

Francis and Young (1979) define a team as being an energetic group of people who are committed to achieving common objectives, who work well together and enjoy doing so, and who produce high quality results. Johnson (1991) defines teams in terms of of interpersonal relationships structured to achieve established goals. Lanza (1985) describes a team as being a group of individuals working together in which the success of any individual is dependent on the success of the entire group. Dyer (1977) and

Badu (2002) similarly describe teams as collections of people who must rely on group collaboration if each member is to experience the optimum sense of success and goal achievement. These specific definitions provided insights into the context of the project and suggested ways in which teamwork could be established.

A knowledge society makes information available and encourages people to commit to organization (Rabey, 2003). Therefore, organizations lead people to work together in order to achieve synergy for a desirable outcome. In this respect, teams need to learn how to develop knowledge, share information, and build on each other's knowledge to create new knowledge and new models, rather than simply adapt the models already existing (Yeh *et al.,* 2006; Savolainen *et al.,* 2007).

The team is an important means of organizational change and continuous improvement through innovative activities. It develops organizational performance through involvement, learning, interaction (Castka *et al.,* 2003). Teamwork culture is widely accepted as a way to face today's turbulent environment and to create a flexible high performance organization responsive to ongoing change and capable of continuous improvement in team and organisational performance. (Castka *et al.,* 2003; Sumanski *et al.,* 2007).

Team roles emphasise on organizational success (Trent, 2003), focusing on quality, the passion to achieve results and confront challenges, on innovation, and the conversion of plans to into workable activities (Water *et al.,* 2008). In this respect, evaluation of the knowledge that is shared among team members has been found to be a prerequisite for successful collaborative teamwork (Leinonen and Bluemink, 2008). This type of collaboration is in high demand and is based on team inventory factors including vision, participative safety, task orientation, support for innovation, and interaction frequency (LoBue, 2002). Huszczo (1990) further provides insights into team types

that will be of value in this project in terms of collaborative work for change and development in working practice.

In higher education program development, project teams are particularly significant for the development of program design based on collaboration and committed decision making process. Teams need to cover these components: inter-team, team member strengths and skills, communication, roles and interdependence, clarity of team goals, decision-making and leadership, organizational support. In relation to these components, team members may maintain differentiated roles within the work groups and one of the members can assume the dual role of trainer and the mentor within the project team (Tarricone and Luca, 2002). My own work based research project aimed to cover these components, and I took on the leadership role to facilitate the team members work in relation to my research focus.

Yuen and Chen (2001) point out that action learning in project teams can help teachers gain the necessary professional competence for making better judgements and taking effective action in ambiguous situations. It thus enhances teachers' professional practice and performance in a changing and uncertain environment. In addition, particularly when teachers interact among themselves, they accumulate experience and learn new knowledge and skills.

Passfield (2002) also underlines that action learning through action research enhances success in program design. Program design elements with personal and organizational outcomes contribute both to synergy and ongoing organizational energy and innovation.

In respect to the aims of my research project, a change oriented action plan was implemented to provide learning, and knowledge sharing for both myself and the core participants in order to promote personal and professional development. Supporting

instructors in adopting new models of teaching, particularly when new technology is involved, provides profound insights concerning teamwork and the commitment of instructors in higher education. Thus a significant focus of my project involved action learning through sharing knowledge and experience. (Ellis *et al.,* 2008).

Duffuaa *et al.* (2003) discuss how the quality of academic programs is drastically affected by the design and delivery of courses. Indeed these two components are central to the development of quality as laid out in the action plan for this work based project process.

Collaborative research into course design and delivery is also a significant element in improving quality by attracting high-quality candidates/students and promoting opportunities for industry engagement (Walker *et al.,* 2008). Rethinking quality in higher education program and courses hence requires a firm platform of teamwork and commitment (Houston, 2008).

Lemmergaard (2008) points out that academic practitioners attempt to work together with a pragmatic approach to improving working practices through project teams. Bokeno (2008) emphasizes that teamwork requires a high level of participation and collaboration. Teams in higher education quality development are populated by interconnected, trusting and committed teachers who willingly contribute their energy and loyalty through collective efforts (Jeffery *et al.,* 2005; Park *et al.,* 2005).

In my work based project, energy and loyalty through the collective efforts of the core members in designing online courses within their project teams are emphasised throughout.

A popular change in higher education involves the use of team management to combine knowledge and education to increase productivity (Denton, 2006). Margaryan (2008) emphasises the need to support instructors in adopting new learning theories

into course design. However, although he considers involvement of instructors, the study remains partial by not focusing sufficiently on the necessity of project teams for change and development in course and program design.

Walker *et al.* (2008) suggest that collaborative research increases the professionalism of practitioners and organization members when they attempt to integrate new knowledge and also enhances the quality of tasks performed through committed decision making process.

Cavaleri and Reed (2008) examine the role of the practitioner as leader, mentor, and facilitator within action learning and look at how project teams approach new tasks and decide together on change of practice. In this respect, my role as leader was significant in that I had responsibility for establishing project teams and evaluating the knowledge and shared decisions in working practice with regard to designing the online courses (Leinonen and Bluemink, 2008).

The study of Hutchins and Hutchison (2008) examines cross-disciplinary research on e-learning from workplace learning, educational technology, and instructional communication disciplines to identify relevant e-learning design principles. The study underlines the need for holistic understanding of online course design and collaborative attempts to innovate change and development within the design process.

The collaborative design process requires team inspiration and cohesion and the effort invested provides insights into professional growth as a reward for those involved in project teams. This study was integral to the theoretical framework of my work based research project and the creation of a team work culture in my working practice while designing online courses.

Constructivist Approach to Online Course Design

Academic professionalism needs to be reinvigorated by the use of online education in higher education (McPherson and Nunes, 2006; Slotte and Herbert, 2006; Moravec, 2008). Srikantham and Dalrymple (2007) emphasize that quality in higher education requires the consideration of different alternative practices. Online education is a strategic transferable product of higher education (Adams, 2007; Bell, 2007; Hartman *et al.,* 2007). As an innovative strategy, it brings many benefits: it is an effective way to provide an individualized learning experience, while also offering opportunities for collaborative learning, as well as enabling learning to continue despite the limitations of distance and time. Learning is an increasingly complex phenomenon and cannot be restricted to the classroom.

Many institutions of higher learning have moved rapidly towards integrating information and communication technology into the teaching and learning environment. Regarding the EUA report on the status of distance education practice in my work context, much attention is devoted to the need to generate action plans for developing online courses and programs. In this respect, I had considerable responsibility for activating the relevant change and development in my own work context.

Online teaching and learning also offer opportunities for educational systems to offer education experiences in different modes, thus contributing to a democratization of learning opportunities (Wallace, 2002; Kim *et al.,* 2005).

Furthermore, online education allows universities to access the mass international market, without requiring costly investment in a campus infrastructure. It promotes greater efficiency in course delivery, supports a greater diversity of pedagogic approaches, increases flexibility for learners and offers extensive opportunities for

interactivity, thus personalizing the learning process and environment (Stacey et al., 2004; Ennew and Young, 2006).

Gunasekaran *et al.* (2002) suggest meanwhile that online education becomes a power to really transform the performance, knowledge and skills in higher education. Sit *et al.* (2005) stress that educational practices in online education aim to facilitate learning by taking responsibility in learning, and through respect for diversity, collaboration, interaction and the use of technology.

Pallof and Pratt (2003) define quality in online education in terms of learner focused. Good practice relies on encouraging student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback and communication, respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

It can be stressed that the knowledge society demands the consideration of the importance of learning how to learn (Bleimann, 2004; Poerksen, 2005). Changes in our educational environment lead to changes in our approaches to teaching and learning. These changes also impact on our teaching and learning paradigms (Brown, 2006).

The essential core of constructivism is that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Steffe and Gale, 1995; Fosnot, 1996). Constructivism exists with three broad categories: cognitive constructivism, social constructivism and radical constructivism (Doolittle, 1997). Cognitive constructivism focuses on the construction of knowledge through information processing with the learner playing a central role. Social constructivism views all knowledge as socially constructed through interactions with other individuals and the environment and maintains an emphasis on language use. Radical constructivism posits that the individual constructs knowledge based on his or her own experiences and may not be a

true representation of external reality as all experiences are subjective (vonGlasersfeld, 1995).

Although these categories of constructivism have significant differences, they share the basic premise of constructivism: learners actively construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Constructivism is often associated with pedagogic approaches that promote active learning, or learning by doing (Duffy and Jonassen 1992).

Adopting constructivist learning in online education was the major innovation in the quality efforts in my work based research project (Haartsen-Geven and Sandberg, 2007), and the constructivist learning perspective was crucial in developing an approach to online education, in which students were actively engaged in seeking knowledge and information in their learning process in small groups (Jonassen, 1991; Cooperstein and Weidinger, 2004; Neo, 2005).

In constructivism, there is a strong belief that learning is a personal interpretation of the world, as learners create interpretations of the world based on their past experience and interpretations (Perkins, 1991; Jonassen, 1994; Duffy and Cunningham, 1996).

Constructivist learning places emphasis on the learners and propounds that learning is affected by their context, beliefs and attitudes. Learners are encouraged to find their own solutions and to build on their prior knowledge and experiences. In doing so, they gain a deeper understanding of the event, thereby constructing their own knowledge and solutions to the problems (Duffy and Jonassen, 1991; Jonassen, 1999). Furthermore, in the constructivist mode of learning, the learning process is shifted towards the student-centric mode, where students become active learners and take more responsibility for their own learning, and in the process learn to construct knowledge on their own, determine their own learning needs, set their own goals,

monitor their own progress and determine how to reach the desired learning outcomes in a collaborative learning environment (Newby *et al.,* 2000; Andrew, 2004).

The study of Reihlen and Apel (2007) stresses learning through the constructivist perspective as interaction with the socio-cultural context. Wilson and Lowry (2000) define constructivist learning as active learning which is constructed, whilst Lefoe (1998), Hall (2002), Neo (2005), Moon *et al.* (2005) provide insights on constructivist pedagogy in online through a set of core design principles within constructivist pedagogy.

These principles, which are adopted in my project, are that learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments, learning should involve social negotiation and mediation, content and skills should be made relevant to the learner and content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge. Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences and encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self aware. Tutors serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors, and should provide and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.

Osborn and Theodore (2005) see constructivist pedagogy in online education as a vehicle for enabling students to manage their own learning through metacognitive, self-reflective and collaborative processes. They also suggest that a constructivist learning environment includes learner control, learning in real life contexts, flexibility in learning, the freedom to choose learning resources and openness in discussing issues.

Regarding the place of constructivist pedagogy in online education, there are benefits to online students in that they are actively involved in the learning process and that they are encouraged to concentrate on learning how to think and understand, since

constructivist learning is transferable and constructivism gives students ownership of what they learn and learning activities are taken place in an authentic, real-world context. Thus, constructivism stimulates and engages students.

Constructivism promotes social and communication skills. Students must learn how to articulate their ideas clearly as well as to collaborate on tasks effectively by sharing in group projects, exchanging ideas and so learning to "negotiate" with others and to evaluate their contributions in a socially acceptable manner (Savery and Duffy, 2001; Hughes and Daykin, 2002). In my work based project, these benefits were considered in designing the online courses and incorporated into the educational philosophy.

The Role of Constructivist Approach in Learning and Developing Skills

The emphasis on collaboration within constructivist online learning is highly important (Allan and Lawless, 2005). Driver (2003) and Oshima *et al.* (2004) state that collaboration in the online process has serious implications for course design. Curriculum and learning pedagogy for an online course thus become an innovation management issue for universities (O'Sullivan, 2003). Siritongthaworn and Krairit (2006) emphasise the importance of instruction as the critical success factor in creating learner satisfaction in online learning. Therefore, both the pedagogical role of the tutor and the course design based on the constructivist approach are essential considerations in this work-based project.

Constructivist tutors tailor their teaching strategies to the students and encourage them to interpret, analyze, and predict information. Tutors focus their course design on creating a rich and socially meaningful learning environment (Gold, 2001). Wallace (2002), Clark and Mayer (2003), Olaniran (2006) also emphasize the role of course design in online learning. An important factor in this process is the shared experience of learning. The open, democratic and collaborative power of the course design based

on constructivist principles can be a crucial way of engendering active engagement in the learning process.

The study of Bravo *et al.* (2004) strengthens the argument that course design in online learning is central to helping students acquire the constructive knowledge necessary for the execution of tasks. In this respect, Zapalska and Brozik (2006) underline that online instruction needs to provide content in multiple formats, allow for individual locus of control and encourage active and collaborative interaction. Hence, project-based learning, and cooperative learning are common techniques for engaging students in activities since they provide creativity, decision-making, and problem solving skills for the learner. The integration of these activities into the learning process, through, for example, collaborative group assignments has a positive influence on student retention in online courses and contributes to the theoretical framework for my project (Fisher and Baird, 2005).

Ausburn (2004) clarifies the course design elements in online education that foster options, personalization, self-direction, variety and the development of a learning community. Online course features are categorized as course announcements and reminders from tutors, course information documents, information about assignments, course instructional materials, personal and contact information for tutor, direct links to posted internet sites, communication, discussion boards and chat and email links. All these are considered in my work based research project in order to bolster learning and skills development of online students within the notion of constructivist pedagogy in online education.

Macdonald (2003) emphasizes that both the process and product of collaboration supports skills development. For learning and skills development, good course design

is the critical factor in that it provides the interactivity to foster active, adaptive learning based on teamwork of the tutors designing the courses (Taylor, 2002).

Combe (2005) provides guidance as to how course content is to be processed for good course design to incorporate collaborative and adaptive learning within the framework of constructivist approach. The steps include identifying the level of online involvement, defining pre-instructional activities, selecting content and determining presentation format, determining learner participation, developing assessment procedures and reviewing activities. These steps are all taken into account in my project.These six basic steps underlie learning and develop transferable skills in the students (Edward, 2001; McLuckie and Topping, 2004).

Patel (2003) and Chii *et al.* (2004) state that the online learning environment fosters critical thinking skills through peer interaction. Furthermore, Wang *et al.* (2001) emphasize that the self-confidence of online students increases through collaborative learning. Wen and Tsai (2006) emphasise the role that collaborative learning plays in knowledge exchange. Furthermore, students gain self-awareness and skills in reflection through collaborative learning (Crow and Smith, 2003; Finger *et al.,* 2006). McLoughlin and Luca (2002) additionally stress that effective pedagogy fosters analysis, communication, higher order thinking and team skills.

Anderton (2006) provides an insight into skill development through constructivist based course design with regard to the ways in which online courses promote self-regulated learning. Reeves *et al.* (2004) meanwhile state that collaboration in an online environment through constructivist based course design promotes higher order problem solving abilities, communication skills and fosters intellectual curiosity.

Neo (2005) also underlines that constructivist learning places emphasis on the learners and comments that learning is affected by their context, beliefs and attitudes. Learners

are encouraged to find their own solutions and to build on their prior knowledge and experiences and in doing so, gain a deeper understanding of the event, thereby constructing their own knowledge and solutions to problems.

In short, the theoretical framework of my project proposes a constructivist based course design through collaborative and active learning process enhance learning, and develop the communication, team and intellectual skills essential for learners in an academic and subsequently professional environment. However, somewhat omitted in the literature is the issue of critical thinking skills as a transferable skill in the constructivist learning process. This is one more element that that my research project needed to incorporate in my action plan.

Discussion

Quality can be driven by continuous improvements based on change oriented actions. The need to gain a competitive advantage also leads higher education institutions to differentiate their services. In this respect, universities seek to find alternative methods such as distance education to differentiate services and promote innovative quality strategies for further development.

Despite the popularity of distance education as a quality strategy, and even its necessity due to higher education policies, standards set by organisations such as the EUA mean that there is considerable need to handle the change and development of pedagogical and organisational aspects of working practice. This needed addressing in my work based research project.

The quality of academic programs relies on the design of the courses within the program (Duffuaa *et al.,* 2003). In designing a program with a new approach requiring innovation, change and adaptation, the commitment of the volunteer teachers was essential (Houston, 2008; Leinonen and Bluemink, 2008).

As Passfield (2002) suggests, with its emphasis on action learning, my work based research project opened a debate on teamwork and a committed, shared decision making process to propose new practices involving teachers as practitioners and underlining course design as the critical factor for the quality of program development (Ho, 2006).

Good course design is a critical ingredient for developing and supporting deep learning (Ramsden 1992; Biggs 1999; Elbaum *et al.,* 2002). Biggs (1999) argues that this involves formulating the intended learning outcomes carefully, designing learning activities that adequately enable students to achieve the learning outcomes, and implementing assessment activities that adequately measure the learning outcomes. Further, he stresses that these three aspects of the course design process should be 'constructively aligned', i.e., be consistent with each other.

Poor course design, on the other hand, will often lead to student dissatisfaction and may even hinder learning (Ramsden 1992; Biggs 1999). Not surprisingly then, researchers in online learning agree that good course design is critical in the success of online courses (Laurillard, 2002; Mason, 2002; Oliver, 2002; Salmon, 2002). But what constitutes 'good' online course design? There is general agreement that online design should support participative, student-centred learning (Ehrmann, 2002; Hall, 2002; Laurillard, 2002; Mason, 2002; Oliver, 2002; Salmon, 2002).

Active participation in online discussions does not occur by itself, but must be intentionally designed into a course (Jung *et al.,* 2002; Laurillard, 2002; Salmon, 2002). Based on a constructivist framework, supporting learners, designing authentic tasks, constructing an environment for learner reflection and incorporating collaboration are key features to encourage participation and enhance learning and

contributed to the theoretical stance of my work based research project (Merrill, 1992; Savery and Duffy, 2001).

Research on online learning and teaching strongly suggests that course design based on a constructivist framework is critical to the success of online practices (Dillon, 2000; Gold, 2001; Ausburn, 2004; Gulati, 2004; Salter *et al.,* 2004; Wiesenberg and Stacey, 2005). Constructivist pedagogy is a significant element in the development of collaborative online practice to enhance the quality of learning and teaching online (Osborn and Theodore, 2005).

The collaborative learning process allows students to construct scaffolding for critical thinking and provides immediacy of feedback in which peers give and receive help, exchange resources and information, give and receive feedback, challenge and encourage each other and jointly reflect on progress and process (Curtis and Lawson, 2001).

Producing students who both present their own views and critically analyze the views of others is the essence of collaborative online learning within the notion of constructivist pedagogy. This perspective also strongly informs the theoretical framework of my project.

Ausburn (2004) found evidence supporting the belief that course design has a great impact on students' learning by investigating the most valued course design elements, namely options, personalization, self-direction, variety and a learning community. A number of arguments have been put forward by other researchers also that constructivist pedagogy accompanies collaborative online learning in order to foster skills (Wang *et al.,* 2001; Huang, 2002; McLoughlin and Luca, 2002; Harris and Bretag, 2003; McLuckie and Topping, 2004).

Huang (2002) also provides an insight into how constructivist principles create a more learner-centred collaborative environment and support critical reflection and an experiential process. McLoughlin and Luca (2002) argue strongly that collaborative learning is an effective pedagogy that fosters skills of analysis, communication and higher order thinking in online students. Harris and Bretag (2003) meanwhile argue for an increased emphasis on collaborative teaching to enhance both the communication skills of students and their learning outcomes. The study of Wang *et al.* (2001) puts an emphasis on the promotion of collaborative learning for the improvement of students' communication skills, awareness of the value of team work, development of effective presentation skills and competences in using tools.

Aside from the considerable academic debate surrounding various issues related to collaborative learning, there is however a gap in understanding the role of constructivist based course design in the enhancement of collaborative online learning as related to the development of critical thinking skills of students.

Thus, although Edwards (2001), Hughes and Daykin (2002), Morrison (2003), Wilhelm (2003), and Fisher and Baird (2005), Neo (2005) provide insights into the impact of constructivist online learning, they fail to stress the significant relationship between the role of course design in developing critical thinking skills and the importance of project team efforts in designing online courses within specific contexts that promote action learning.

As constructivism revolves around the issue of how the collaborative process makes learners present their views and critically analyze the views of others, there is a need to extend our knowledge of what elements in course design specifically develop the critical thinking skills of students within the action learning process. This confirms the need to create an action plan for online course design that incorporates this

fundamental element into a framework for qualified practice in distance education institutes (Elbaum *et al.,* 2002). Thus, development of online course design through a constructivist approach constitutes a significant research focus that needs to be investigated in order to promote better working practices based on action learning and team work culture. My work based research project therefore has the potential to play a significant role in filling the gap in the literature and meeting institutional need as directed by the EUA report.

2.4 Research Statement and Research Questions

The research focus of my project is creating an awareness of the importance of team work culture in the Distance Education Institute for collaboratively designing online courses and implementing a constructivist approach to online course designs to develop the learning and skills of online students. My action plan provided a basis for answering the following research questions in order to accomplish my research aims and objectives in my work based research project:

Q1. To what extent does the Distance Education Institute employ team work in the implementation of online course design?

Q2. To what extent do online courses designed by the Distance Education Institute incorporate the principles of a constructivist approach?

Q3. How does constructivist based collaborative learning operate in the online program?

Q4. To what extent does constructivist based online course design foster/limit skills development of students?

Q5. Based on the constructivist approach, what online course design elements create the environment for collaborative learning and thus contribute to the development of critical thinking skills?

Throughout the inductive process, these research questions helped me to follow deliberate sequences of actions in my action plan with the voluntary participation of core members.

Regarding the research questions, the first step was to explore to what extent the Distance Education Institute employed team work in the design of online courses. In this respect, I attempted to use in-depth interviews to gain insights into awareness and commitment in course design decision making processes. In-depth interviews provided a base line measurement for the training that followed. I conducted training to develop knowledge and experience of team work culture and create project teams to encourage core members to work together in online course design.

In examining to what extent online course design at the Distance Education Institute practiced the principles of the constructivist approach, I conducted semi-structured interviews with online tutors to explore awareness of the constructivist approach and its implications in order to understand how the approach was realized in the online program. Along with the semi-structured interviews, I analyzed the design of the online courses using a checklist about the principles of the constructivist approach derived from Merrill (1992), Dillon (2000), Gold (2001), Savery, Duffy (2001), Huang (2002), Ausburn (2004) – the researchers who provided the theoretical framework for my project.

In order to implement the constructivist approach into online course design in an efficient way, I conducted training to help tutors gain further understanding of the constructivist approach and its integration into their online courses. This training encapsulated change and development in teaching philosophy and thereby enhanced the professional growth of the tutors. After the training, there was an integration of the constructivist approach into online courses, which obviously required an adaptation

process. During this process, in order to examine how the constructivist based collaborative learning was performing, I conducted focus group activities to be proactively engaged in any immediate changes that might be needed during the adaptation process.

In order to examine to what extent constructivist based course design elements enhance the learning and skills development of students, I conducted semi-structured interviews with online students and tutors. In line with the semi-structured interviews, self-reports based on scaling structured the reflections of the students on the development of their particular skills in the online context.

Throughout the process, I kept a diary to report each of the actions for change and development in my participatory action research. The feedback forms which were gathered from core members provided a further basis for increasing the efficiency of my research project and its efforts to ensure better working practice. My project was to be developed into a handbook of good practice based on participatory action research and which would meet the needs of the target audiences and the requirements of the EUA report. The handbook would then be shared with other higher education institutions through submission to the Higher Education Councils in both North Cyprus and Turkey. The inductive journey that proceeded provided a significant professional reward to me in my academic career.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in my work based research project. It begins with my evaluation and justification of the adoption of a qualitative research design and action research approach in my project. Furthermore, I discuss the justification for choosing an action research approach and the importance of being a motivated insider and worker researcher in the research process.

I highly concentrate on ethical considerations and reasons for the choice of data collection techniques. I further detail how data from multiple techniques were triangulated and analyzed. The chapter ends by explaining my research process.

3.2 Chosen Research Design: Qualitative Research Journey

Research designs differ significantly as a result of differences in philosophical viewpoints such as positivism and anti positivism. Qualitative inquiry, as is well documented, deals with meaning and aims to investigate what is happening in particular contexts based on the role of the motivated insider as a researcher assuming an anti positivist position (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) have developed a generic description of qualitative research:

> "it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.5)

The above definition justifies my choice of qualitative inquiry for my project as it is a set of interpretive activities to understand the socially constructed meanings within the work context. As practitioner research in educational practice relies on understanding

what is happening and why, an appropriate research design would be able to follow the anti-positivist position by using qualitative research based on an inductive process. Grounded theory is a qualitative research type that is concerned with building theory. It goes beyond description of the context to seek connections and explanations. In this respect, I attempt to use grounded theory to develop insights into areas in which theory is limited or does not exist.

Cohen *et al.* (2000) provide in-depth insights on epistemological and methodological understanding in educational practices. I considered four critical questions through which they helped me develop my professional knowledge and formulate the design of my project. These questions are listed below:

> Q1. What epistemology - theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective - informs the research (e.g., objectivism, subjectivism)?
>
> Q2. What theoretical perspective-philosophical stance lies behind the methodology in question (e.g., positivism, interpretivism, etc.)?
>
> Q3. What methodology-strategy or plan of action that links methods to outcome-governs our choice and use of methods (e.g., survey, case study, ethnography, etc.)?
>
> Q4. What methods- techniques and procedures-do we propose to use (e.g., interview, focus group, etc.)?

Saunders *et al.* (2000) provide guidelines for the research process that helped me internalize an in-depth understanding of my research process. According to those guidelines, there are two main philosophical positions in research: positivism and anti-positivist. Further to this, the two main approaches to research are deductive and inductive with the choice of research approach influencing the research questions and

objectives. The main research strategies are survey, case study, ethnography and action research.

Research projects may be cross-sectional or longitudinal and they may be classed as exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Significantly, multi method approaches to research enable triangulation of results from the different methods of gathering data. In qualitative research, we should ensure the results are credible. Furthermore, the researcher taking an insider perspective should consider ethical issues.

Since the overall aim of my project is implementing a constructivist approach to the online course designs to develop the skills of online students in Distance Education Institute at EMU, an in-depth investigation on constructed meanings and experiences of institute members is required to acquire a better understanding of the complex elements of constructivist based online course designs and the skills development of online students within the particular context.

Qualitative research was the appropriate research design for my in-depth investigation since it enabled the exploration of meanings and experiences and provided the basis for better practice within context based on change and innovation.

Through an inductive process, my project aims to explore team work inspiration and create a team work culture within the institute. It evaluates the awareness of tutors about the constructivist approach in their online courses and implements a constructivist approach to online course designs. Finally, the project evaluates the perceptions of tutors and the students regarding the implementation of the constructivist approach in online courses and the development of learning and skills of online students through team work.

Regarding the multiple aims within my project, I implemented a series of actions based on multiple data collection techniques. The research aims at proposing a good

work practice that can be shared with other professionals and other higher education institutions.

3.3 Approach Chosen for My Work based Research Project

Action research was chosen as an appropriate approach for my project as intervention and subsequent evaluation contribute to existing knowledge and deal with problematic situations through organizational change and innovation (Gill and Johnson, 1997).

In this approach, the primary importance to educational research in institutions is:

> "to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (Gill, Johnson, 1997:62).

Gonzalez *et al.* (2004) define action research as the heart of interpretation in understanding the practices that may result in change. In addition, Cook (2004) points out that it is an innovative, interagency, reflective practice of working together for change. In this respect, action research in practice aims to solve specific managerial problems, to generalize from the specific and to contribute to theory based on the collaboration and intervention of the organizations' members. In other words, action research is a systematic inquiry to diagnose a problem within a specific context and seek solutions based on the change and learning cycle.

Action research is a continual learning process which organizations, especially educational institutions, need to adopt to engage within a competitive market (Saito *et al.* 2007). In this respect, individuals within organizations need to develop insights for problem solving and development and give regard to collaboration and the transformation of learning into practice. Therefore, collectivity for change and innovation within educational practice is a crucial element in the action research process (Lomax *et al.,* 1996). Lomax *et al.* (1996) define action research as:

> "...a form of practitioner research that can be used to help you improve your professional practices in many different types of workplaces" (p.7).

In educational research, educational values, educational professionalism, reflection, and the development of a critical community are central principles in carrying out collaborative action research. Zajc and Bednarz (2007) describe action research as a professional development strategy aimed at changing professional practices. This learning cycle involves collective assessment, collaborative actions, group support, and intervention. In this respect, action research focuses on problems and improvement in educational practices as a result of community analysis within a specific context.

Freebody (2003) defines action research as:

> "deliberate, solution oriented investigation that is group or personally owned and conducted. It is characterized by spiraling cycles of problem investigation, systematic data collection, reflection, analysis, data driven action taken, and finally problem redefinition. The linking of the terms 'action' and 'research' highlights the essential features of this method: trying out ideas in practice as means of increasing knowledge about and/or improving curriculum, teaching and learning" (p.86).

Mills (2003) supports the argument that action research aims to take action and effect positive educational change in the specific school environment under study. Action research provides insights, develops reflective practice, effects positive change and improves the professional knowledge of those involved in the learning cycle.

Action research is a collaborative tool requiring the participation and willingness of the members to create change and development. This involves decision making authority, continuing professional development and context improvement, reflecting on practice, using a systematic approach, choosing an area of focus, determining data collection techniques: analyzing and interpreting the data, and developing action plans for change within specific educational context.

Besides change and innovation in the specific context, action research contributes professional growth opportunities to those involved and facilitates the development of reflective practitioner amongst researchers (Halton, 2004; Bustingorry, 2008). Regarding my own project, this collaborative research encouraged me as an insider researcher and the participants to be continuous learners in our practice (Mills, 2003).

Action research has two dimensions, which are the researcher as a learner, based a personal development (reflection), and the researcher as a collaborator, based on the validation of practice and knowledge (reflexivity). In my action research process, I become a self-critical, reflective researcher (Schön, 1991; Pring, 2000).

In a reflective inquiry, action research involves selecting the focus of the inquiry and studying the available literature, collecting the data from a variety of sources, using forms of ethnographic and case study techniques, analyzing, documenting and reviewing the effects of teachers' and students' actions, developing and implementing interpretive analytic categories, organizing the data and its interpretation, taking actions based on short and long-term plans, and repeating the cycle. In my own project these were the stages I considered in attempting to achieve results and success (Altrichter *et al.,* 1993; Cohen *et al.,* 2000).

As this inquiry proposes change and innovation to practices in a specific context, the advantages of the action research approach require justification:

- it bridges the gap between research and practice
- it develops creative and critical individuals within their practice and encourages them to become continuous learners
- it increases reflective practitioners' feelings of self-worth and confidence
- it increases awareness of problems and solutions.

- it helps researchers to become aware of their own perceptual biases and values.
- it questions practitioners' educational values and beliefs.
- it builds and broadens practitioners' views about their practices.
- It is consistently the vehicle for personal, professional or organizational change.

(Altrichter *et al.,* 1993; Cotton and Griffiths, 2007)

Action research as a learning cycle also has limitations and I became aware of these disadvantages while conducting action research in my workplace. As an insider researcher, being too close to the issue that needs to be investigated may raise validity and reliability problems. Issues of ethics such as confidentiality of the participants require willing consent and stakeholders and participants need to aware and comfortable with the research process, particularly one that involves change and innovation (Saunders *et al.,* 2000).

Action research involves research applied to practical issues occurring in educational practice. The aim is to engineer change and monitor results for improvement within the work setting. In this respect, there is an emphasis on facilitating group work to improve the situation. In this cyclic process, planning, acting, observing and reflecting are the key components to implement actions and increase contextual knowledge (Altrichter *et al.,* 1993).

Action research is problem focused, context specific and future orientated. It involves intervention in which research, action and evaluation are interlinked with each other. Ledwith (2007) discusses emancipatory action research, which focuses on identifying and changing practices through participatory and holistic knowing, critical

subjectivity, and knowledge in action within the frame of critical reflectivity to propose improvements.

In this regard, my aim was to bring about improvements by identifying and clarifying problems, identifying and implementing change oriented actions to improve the situation, and testing and implementing to determine the impact of the changes made through the participatory action research process.

The action research cycle thus provides a critical examination of the relationship of theory and practice for change:

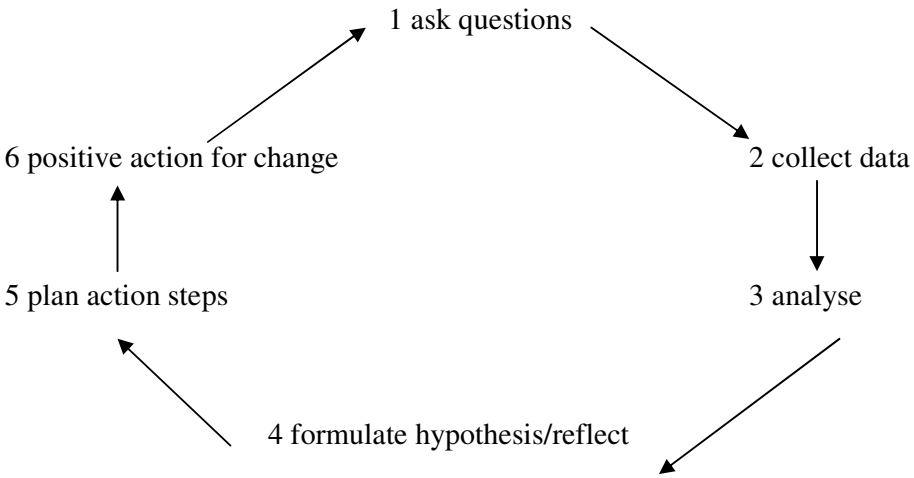


Figure 1. Action Research Cycle. (Middlesex University Module Handbook, 2008:70).

I used this cycle in my work based learning as it focuses on the researcher as worker needing to improve their own or their colleagues' practice. My project was grounded in an action plan to change, implement a new approach and improve the practices of online courses.

The report of the EUA on online education practice in my work place was the significant evidence leading me to employ participatory action research approach for change and innovation in my project. Participatory action research involves experiential knowing, a practical knowing process which requires the involvement of

the members within a specific context for change and innovation (Moore, 2004; Williams, 2007; Beatty *et al.,* 2008; Eilertsen *et al.,* 2008).

In this respect, action research is one of the most popular methods of professional development, providing a practical way to uncover the complexities of the teaching process thereby to improve the quality of learning (Altrichter *et al.,* 1993). My project followed the process of finding a starting point, clarifying the situation, developing action strategies, putting them into practice in teacher training and making this knowledge public. As Hubbard and Power (1993) describe it, that I attempt perform the roles of model, counsellor, learner, listener, questioner and ego builder. Overall, the following statements justify my chosen research approach as appropriate for change and success within my work based research process:

- Willingness to change practices within context; aiming at improvements in online course design through a constructivist approach and involvement in team decision making
- Dealing with individuals as members of the Distance Education Institute
- Targeting small scale research within a specific work context
- Being an expert on distance education practices and being a facilitator and researcher in my work setting
- Considering research, action and evaluation for future oriented success and continual learning as a reflective practitioner

I present the stages of my action research plan in Figure 2 along with justification for the choice of approach:

Inductive Process Focus: Implementing a Constructivist Approach into Online Course Design in the Distance Education Institute at EMU

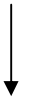
Action Research Cycles

Cycle I

Objective: Evaluating current situation and creating team work culture	1. Asking Questions 2. Collecting data 3. Analyzing 4. Reflecting 5. Planning actions 6. Positive action for change	Action I: In-depth Interviews Focus: Exploring the team inspiration of the institute for collaborative decision making process in relation to course design. Action II: Training Focus: Team work and decision making process for course design (Keeping research diary)

Cycle II

Objective: Evaluating the awareness of tutors about the constructivist approach	1. Asking Questions 2. Collecting data 3. Analyzing 4. Reflecting 5. Planning actions 6. Positive action for change	Action III: Semi-structured Interviews Focus: Exploring awareness of online tutors about principles of constructivist approach Action IV: Documentary Analysis Focus: Analyzing online course design regarding the principles of the constructivist approach (Keeping research diary)



Cycle III

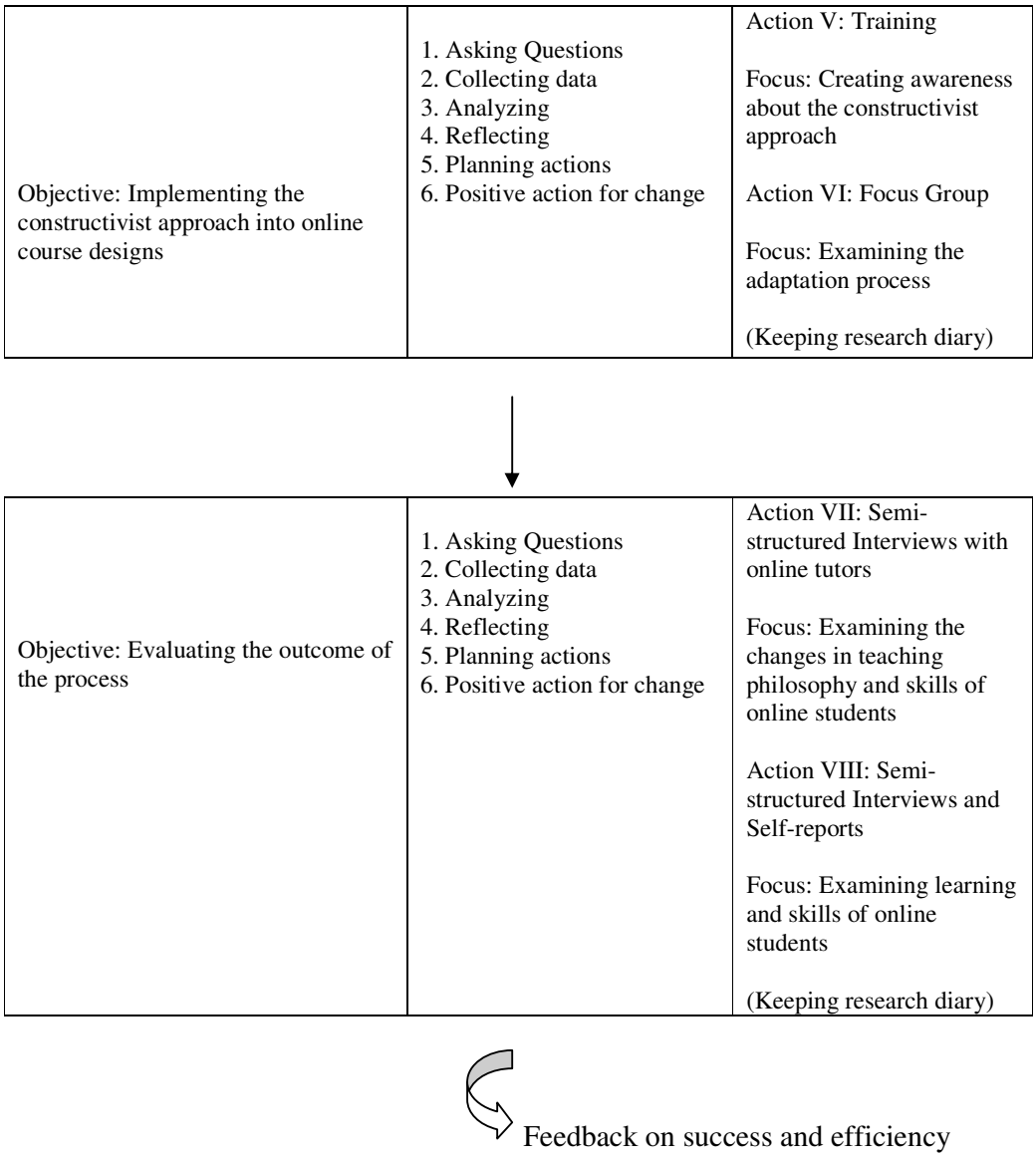


Figure 2. Justification of Chosen Research Approach with Its Stages.

(Adapted from Freebody, 2003; Mills, 2003; Middlesex University Handbook, 2008).

To conclude, my project involves qualitative research based on participatory action research. It involves a series of actions based on multiple data collection techniques, including keeping a research diary and theoretical and practical activities to aim at improvement. It is inquiry that embraces collaboration of members to change practices and depends on their reflectivity and a systematic learning process to sustain a future

oriented collectivity. In other words, it is a disciplined inquiry, in which a personal attempt is made to understand, improve and reform practices within my work setting. In the following section I explore gaining and maintaining access to the research context as a motivated insider seeking change and innovation through participatory action research.

3.4 The Sample Selection, Gaining and Maintaining Access

Gaining and maintaining access is an important part of the action research process, as access restrictions can limit opportunities for involvement in the research context. I therefore tried to achieve regular or sustained access agreements prior to data collection as this would be vital for my research (Eilertsen *et al.,* 2008).

There is no magic recipe which sets out how a sample should be selected and access gained. The sampling strategy of my project was based on voluntary participation. In addition to this, locating core members within the organisation was a significant determiner of the sampling frame.

Core participants for the research were selected according to prior knowledge of the researcher, experience in research and having a clear idea about the purpose (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). In this respect, core members included the institute director, online tutors and volunteer students.

Silverman (2000) suggests that there is need to be flexible and opportunistic in gaining and maintaining access especially in qualitative inquiry. In addition, it is recommended to have warm contacts as a researcher to gain access from gate keepers for carrying out research within a specific context. Regarding my work based project, being a worker researcher within the organisation, having warm contacts with colleagues, having also a professional understanding of the subject field, research process and ethics all contributed to gain access to the context (Altrichter *et al.,* 1993). For my research

project, access was gained into the Distance Education Institute through having warm contact with the stakeholders and being a worker researcher in the field of online education.

My project was funded by the Ministry of Education in order to assist the development of the institute according to EUA standards and in partial fulfilment of the action plan at EMU. In this respect, Distance Education Institute was thought to be an appropriate case because it central to the strategic planning of quality improvements within the university. I therefore achieved what was theoretically desirable and practically possible.

With the help of the Director of the Distance Education Institute online tutors and other parties were approached and informed about the project and its aims. I established contacts with other members of the institute.

Confidentiality was guaranteed and ensured by sharing a research package by participants. This research package covered the focus of research, approach and methods and included a consent form. Promising change and innovation in online course design through participatory and collective action research was also influential in the negotiation process. In the following section, I reflect on my role as a motivated insider in my work based project.

3.5 My Role as Insider in the Research Process

Research can be defined as gaining new, or verifying existing knowledge through detailed study of a subject. Kerlinger (1983) defines research as a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomenon. Similarly, Best (1970) defines research as a systematic activity directed toward discovery and development of an organized body of knowledge. Research is of an applied nature as it aims to provide us

sound knowledge for taking decisions and actions, and finding better solutions to problems (Verma and Mallick, 1999).

Regarding the above definitions of research, there is an intensified need to consider systematic inquiry within specific contexts and fields, especially in educational practice, in order to discover an organized body of knowledge from which to take informed decisions and actions. As educational research involves systematic enquiry, collection and analysis of information the researcher has a high level of responsibility and needs to demonstrate sophisticated research skills to secure credible outcomes and contribute new knowledge and a better appreciation of the issues involved in the given context.

Much educational research is concerns transactions between the learner and teacher within a framework of agreed purposes and underlying procedural values (Pring, 2000). In educational research, studying social phenomena and interpreting the meanings leads naturally to research that seeks to understand human experience and both formulate new knowledge and improve it through the research outcomes. Therefore, I attempt to view social phenomena holistically, systematically reflect on being an insider researcher, and use complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative to generate new knowledge and bring about change and development.

As Pring (2000) points out, educational researchers need to think in eclectic ways to handle educational practices within particular contexts. I therefore consider the problems under investigation from the perspective of getting people to learn and to understand how actors within the educational system interpret change oriented actions and improvements in the knowledge and learning cycle.

As action research aims at improvement and development of practice through change oriented actions within a specific context, the institutional support and commitment of

actors within that educational context is crucial for success (Hubbard and Power, 1993; Mills, 2003). In this respect, this cycle of learning and reflection for change constituted a serious responsibility in terms of reaching desirable outcomes within the research context (Pring, 2000; Mills, 2003). As a reflective practitioner, I propose to implement professional activities for the expansion of professional knowledge in order to achieve institutional success in change and development (Schön, 1991).

In my work based project, I would have inside knowledge of the problem and issues to be researched. This was a positive feature of embarking on a work-based project, since I would know more about the problem and issues within my research context. I would be able to use my insider position as a strategy to solve problems within the research setting. My work based project thus proposed to develop a holistic understanding of the organisation from an insiders' or emic perspective to capture categories of meaning in order to explain the causal relationships between organisational actions (Hubbard and Power, 1993; Silverman, 2000).

In this respect, I attempted to work in collaboration with other members for change within the workplace through having warm contacts and access to the field. Another positive influence of being a worker researcher was familiarity with the resources and being able to find those resources easily. In other words, knowledge about the organisation was readily accessible. Using the advantage of being an insider researcher, I could find volunteer members of staff to collaborate with and get information from them that would help create change within the organisation. Furthermore, I had access to stakeholders (Academic Affairs, Ministry of Education, Distance Education Institute and its core members) that would be fundamental to gaining access to the research site and securing participation on a voluntary basis.

Thus, the potential advantage of being a worker researcher is that the researcher knows more about the organisational culture and climate, understand its members and is better able to implement proactive decisions and evaluate potential decisions within the organisation. Being a worker researcher has the genuine potential to increase the quality of practice in the workplace setting.

The worker researcher must also have the dedication to be critical and proactive within all stages of the research, questioning, challenging and using specific clues and patterns to facilitate understanding and organisational change and improvement. The potential advantages of being a worker researcher as regards my role are listed below:

- Having access to the research context
- Knowing about the history and culture of the organisation
- Having experience in the subject field
- Being close to resources
- Having willingness and intrinsic motivation to change practices

There are however negative aspects to being a worker researcher. The main negative aspect is being so close to the problem that needs to be investigated. This knowledge of detail in the research setting could lead to a loss of objectivity. In addition, personal expectations and values could influence the credibility of my research findings. In other words, an outsider researcher might be more objective, carrying out research without bias and expectations. It is incumbent on the worker researcher to use appropriate research skills accordingly.

There are thus positive and negative aspects of being a worker researcher and clearly there is a need to be aware of potential risks within the process and maintain a balance of objectivity, values, and expectations (Armsby, 2000).

The disadvantages of being a worker researcher are summarised below:

- Being too close to the problem
- Being affected by personal values and expectations
- Having limited experience of research and ethical considerations
- Dual roles and workloads

In my research project, I had an insider role within work context to propose change oriented actions for better working practice. As my work based project aimed at improvements in online course designs by implementing a constructivist approach to developing particular skills of online students, I had the opportunity to contribute to both my own and others' professional knowledge through the participatory action research process.

My project was applied research which attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice for change and innovation (Cotton and Griffiths, 2007). My primary role was to improve practice in the work setting and develop a learning cycle within which professionals think and act collaboratively.

Regarding the focus of my work based project, I attempted to be an active, reflective, facilitator at each stage of the action research process in order to reach desirable outcomes (Hubbard and Power, 1993). In addition, having dual roles in personal and professional life, being a member of the Distance Education Institute and a senior instructor in the Faculty of Education as well as being a researcher in the educational technology field and being aware of the desired action plan for the Distance Education Institute all justified the use of a motivated insider aiming at the improvement and development of online education practice.

Being a motivated insider provided positive insights in the implementation of my project. Having access to the stakeholders and knowing the potential problems that needed to be investigated, knowing more about the culture and patterns of the

organisation and being close to the resources in the work setting were all advantages of being a worker researcher. The contributions of my work based research project can be summarised as follows:

- Internalizing and developing team spirit among members
- Enhancing collegiality based on a continual learning process
- Empowering collaboration among staff and professional bodies, transferring in-depth knowledge to others
- Improving perspectives on work based projects in working practice for change
- Finding solutions to context specific problems based on collaboration

Although being a worker researcher has advantages for the researcher and the participants, there are also disadvantages and potential risks, including being too close to the research problem, being influenced by one's own values and expectations, bias, and dual workload The worker researcher thus needs to manage each step of the process strategically. I minimised potential risks by considering sensitivity on ethics, objectivity within the research process, and the implementation of actions from a strategic perspective. I examine ethical considerations in the following section.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In this part of the chapter, I explore how a worker researcher can deal with issues of a confidential or ethical nature while carrying out work based projects. In my own work based research project, I maintained strict sensitivity towards ethical issues.

Ethics are considered a critical factor within research. Ethics refers to concepts of anonymity, confidentiality, trust, willingness, transparency, and dignity in research in the pursuit of valid and reliable results. Ethical principles should be associated with the

research focus, the interrelations of research stages and the confidentiality of participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Cohen *et al.,* 2000).

Ethical concerns may emerge during planning, whilst seeking access to the organisation and to individuals, or whilst collecting, analysing and reporting research data (Saunders *et al.,* 2000). Ethics in research are underpinned by the agreements which researchers enter into with research subjects or contacts. Ethical problems may arise when there is a conflict of interests which may occur due to the conflicting demands of confidentiality or anonymity, legality or professionalism.

In qualitative research, the researcher enters the lives of the participants invited to be part of the study (Marshall, Rossman, 1999). This brings a range of strategic, ethical and personal issues that researchers need to consider during the inductive process. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) state:

> "these issues can be sorted into technical ones that address entry and the efficiency in terms of role and interpersonal ones that capture the ethical and personal dilemmas that arise during the conduct of a study" (p. 79).

In terms of technical considerations, the management of the researcher's time and resources and negotiating access are crucial issues that were undertaken in this research process. Saunders *et al.* (2000) emphasize that access is a critical aspect of the conduct of research. It is vital to recognize that access is the continuing process and not just an initial or single event. In this respect, it could be problematic area, in terms of gaining permission for physical access, maintaining access, and being able to create sufficient scope to address research objectives.

Additionally, being an insider researcher raises questions about researcher status in the organization, which could pose particular problems in relation to cognitive access. Saunders *et al.* (2000) discuss problems with cognitive access as follows:

> "This may be related to suspicions about why you are undertaking your research project and the use that will be made of data, perceptions about the part of organization for which you work and your grade status in relation to those whom you wish to be your research participants" (p.117).

In this respect, ethical concerns again emerged as the researcher planned research, sought access to stakeholders and collected, analyzed and reported on data. Therefore, I considered time, resources for research feasibility, establishing warm contacts with stakeholders based on negotiations, preparing a research package to inform participants about the purpose of the research project and its potential benefits to the organization, having permission and proposing confidentiality through consent forms, maintaining sensitivity on data collection and analysis, giving guarantees to the participants about the feedback, and sharing research outcomes through a handbook in order to prevent ethical pitfalls in the action research process (See Appendix B, p.187).

Besides these technical considerations, I approached the interpersonal dimension by building trust, maintaining good relations, and respecting norms of reciprocity through strategic actions. In my work based research project, experience and professionalism in research enabled me to justify my capacity to carry out research and reach the expected outcomes in order to build trust with the stakeholders.

As trust is a critical part of action research and ethics, I demonstrated research skills and personal energy in establishing and maintaining trust and access and negotiation before conducting the research and data collection process. In addition, my project was approved by the institute, university and Ministry of Education as a project to develop quality in line with the EUA report. This provided support and confidence to me in this endeavour and encouraged participants to contribute on a voluntary basis, which is a crucial element in research and ethics (Hubbard and Power, 1993). I thus

carefully considered the time and resources available to carry out the research by being proactive at each stage, and sensitive at all times to accompanying ethics.

My project was a qualitative inquiry with an appropriate approach, data collection techniques that were driven by research questions, and aims and objectives based on an extended literature review. Using appropriate data collection techniques for each particular focus and using triangulation for verification of multiple data interpretation prevented any pitfall within the research stages (Hubbard and Power, 1993).

During the research, I maintained the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and although they had the right to withdraw, no one did so at any time. In the consent forms, the research package and the negotiations with participants, it was also confirmed that feedback was the part of the research. In addition, participants were also assured that the research outcomes would be shared with them in the prepared handbook.

Ethical understanding is a critical success factor in my project that needs to be discussed in detail. Conducting a funded project based on qualitative research implying social interaction for the interpretations of experiences of others raises stressful ethical issues and concerns. Further, carrying out a funded project increased the high level of responsibility I had as a worker researcher.

EMU initiated collaboration with the Ministry of Education for the funding of the research project in order to improve the quality of structure and the programs within the university based on EUA standards. Regarding the EUA report on university wide research policy and the sustainable need for change in the status of the Distance Education Institute through various projects (See Appendix A, p.166), I applied for funding for my project. This put me in a leadership role in which I was responsible for

delegating expenditure as well as research action. I therefore had to manage my leadership role in a strategic and efficient way, using funding for participation at conferences, training, procedural materials, incentives for participants and the technical infrastructure of Distance Education Institute as well as implementing the research itself.

As an insider researcher, gaining funding for my project provided me with the power and confidence to carry out my work-based research project. In this respect, funding from the Ministry of Education and EMU become significant official evidence verifying the importance of my project and my own professional capacity to carry out a project for innovation and change in my working practice.

Although it is difficult process to gain funding for research projects due to economical problems and limited resources, the value of my project with its aims and originality brought success in this regard. This created confidence and trust between me and participants throughout the research process.

However, there were challenges during the research process. Funds were short and on occasion I had to supplement the expenditure from my own resources. In addition, EMU and the Ministry of Education fund projects that require change and innovation in a short time period. This created stress and a huge workload that I had to manage with my own personal and professional skills.

I have tried to clarify the issue of power with regard to funded research and consider the issue of ethics in terms of research implications for stakeholders (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). It was essential that ethical principles were guaranteed in my work based project. In particular, principles such as the anonymity of participants and the students, maintaining confidentiality and voluntary participation as part of the action research process, treating data and verifying statements based on cross examination

and triangulation, submitting a final copy of the project to the participants and preparing a beneficial handbook for the university and the ministry that funded the project were initial considerations before putting the research into practice (Altrichter *et al.,* 1993).

Further regarding ethical principles, I became sensitive on observing protocol, negotiating with those affected, reporting progress, accepting responsibility for maintaining confidentiality and making principles of procedure binding and known. In observing protocol, I have taken care to ensure that relevant persons, committees, and authorities have been consulted, informed and that necessary permissions and approvals have been granted. In addition, I informed the stakeholders - the Distance Education Institute, Academic Affairs of EMU and Ministry of Education, my colleagues and the online students through the research package and the consent forms of all aspects of the process.

I thus kept the work visible and remained open to suggestions throughout the research process. Further to this, I filed reports on the progress of the project to the university and the ministry as the main stakeholders in terms of the funding and procedures of the research process. Within my research journey, I took a strategic approach at every stage the research process, and this helped me cope with the ethical principles.

3.7 Choice of Data Collection Techniques

The anti-positivist philosophy is a mode of attempting to understand the meaning of events and interactions in particular situations by the interpretive understanding of human interaction (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Saunders *et al.,* 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Qualitative research design encapsulates multiple ways of interpreting experiences in which the meaning of experiences constitutes reality. Choosing multiple research

techniques hence enables research to gain insights into one situation from different angles (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Hubbard and Power, 1993; Silverman, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Systematic inquiry in action research is thus followed by innovative, evolving data through multiple data collection techniques. Therefore, triangulation becomes an important part of the choice of data collection techniques and analytic method for accomplishing valid and reliable research outcomes (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). It is necessary because different data collection techniques have different strengths and different weaknesses, and therefore, the possibility of getting a more complete picture is higher (Hubbard and Power, 1993; Creswell, 1994).

With reference to the above discussion, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and complementary documentary analysis and focus groups, and self-reports based on scaling were chosen for my research project, of all which are considered to be appropriate strategies to obtain in-depth contextually specific information within the action research process (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Cohen *et al.,* 2000).

I considered that using multiple data collection techniques could not only provide rich and valuable information about investigated phenomena, but also test one source of information against another and examine alternative explanations by bringing different forms of evidence from different actions through verification of data based on triangulation.

The following parts of section evaluate the appropriateness of each data collection technique within the research process. The techniques were reviewed by two experts and piloted.

Issue-Focused In-depth Interview Technique

Interviews can be described as a conversation with purpose. They can be used in the qualitative inquiry research to cover predetermined response categories with the attitude that participants' views are both valuable and useful (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2004).

According to Cohen *et al.* (2000), the use of interviews in research marks a move towards gaining soft, primary data that generates knowledge and meaning through conversation. Interviews provide opportunities for response-keying, asking, probing, and rating to understand the perceptions, thoughts and understanding of the issues under investigation.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) point out that qualitative researchers tend to use in-depth interviews which are exploratory with pre-determined response categories in specific issues. Other potential advantages of interviews include getting a large amount of data quickly, overcoming the inconvenience caused by direct observation; and gaining control during the process through in-depth, dense information gathering. This makes it a popular technique in action research.

However, it has limitations such as the likelihood of bias regarding interviewees' interpretations, or lack of expertise or familiarity with the local language that is used in the process. In this respect, I considered the potential limitations of using interviews in action research and became sensitive to ethics to maintain trust and confidentiality between myself and the participants who were part of the change and learning cycle.

I attempted to employ an issue-focused in-depth interview technique for my research project. This was considered appropriate for the first focus of my action research, which was exploration of the current awareness of core members to committed decision making processes for online course design. This stage thereby provided

groundwork for subsequent training about teamwork to encourage online course design based on collaboration.

In-depth interviews are thus a major data collection technique action research (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). It is an exploratory type method which provides in-depth understanding about an issue within a specific context (Saunders *et al.,* 2000). In my research, in-depth interviews ran for sixty minutes through face to face contacts with participants using open-ended, issue specific questions to understand the respondents' world, opinions, beliefs and perceptions about the research context.

Sixteen core members helped me gather qualitative data through in-depth conversations to explore their awareness of team work inspiration in the decision making process for online course design and provide grounds for a further series of actions within an inductive, continual learning process.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are another major data collection technique used in my research project. They are regarded as the most important form of interviewing in work based projects due to flexibility in collecting information of a complex nature (Saunders *et al.,* 2000). In my project, semi-structured interviews were employed at several points in the inductive process. Firstly, twelve participants were used for evaluating the awareness of online tutors about the constructivist approach in online course design. Then, semi-structured interviews were used to evaluate the implementation of the constructivist approach through online course design. Valuable data from online tutors and students were gathered from these face to face conversations. Using semi-structured interviews with tutors and the students also enabled evaluation of the outcomes of implementing the constructivist approach in online course design and the research project itself. In these face to face semi-

structured interviews, seven online tutors and fourteen students responded to the open, closed and leading questions, which were reviewed by experts and piloted. In this respect, semi-structured interviews were a time consuming process, but one which allowed the collection of valuable data about opinions, experiences and expectations.

Documentary Analysis

I attempt to use documentary analysis as a complementary data collection technique within the action research process. It can be underlined that information obtained from the documents could be compared and contrasted to the findings from the other information sources to determine the true picture of the issue that is investigated. Documents can be listed as reports, literature, organisational achieves, etc. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

The documents could complement primary data, or confirm or contradict findings. In this project, documentary analysis confirmed the obtained information on the awareness of online tutors about the constructivist approach in online course design. In this respect, I analyzed four online courses. The prepared checklist helped me evaluate the course designs regarding to constructivist approach principles and confirmed the responses of the online tutors in the semi-structured interviews. The technique was particularly useful for my project in terms of increasing the richness of data concerning the awareness of tutors about the constructivist approach in online course design and constructing a "fuller picture" for further action.

Focus Group

Focus groups are another type of interviewing in action research that help observe sociological processes as collective human interaction (Patton, 2002). It is a collectivistic data collection technique to gather large amounts of information about

human interaction through group involvement and participation in a limited period of time. It is one of a number of group interview techniques (Creswell, 1994:73).

It has a structured format with an exploratory purpose which pre-tests the problem that needs to be addressed. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) point out that focus group has the capacity to reach more than one participant and gather a large amount of information within a short period of time. In other words, it is not a time consuming technique.

Groupthink is however a possible outcome, although the findings can be generalized. The researcher role, ethics and the issues of validity and reliability are not very different from individual interviews. The most important issues in focus groups are the number of the groups, sampling, and role of researcher in directing conversation and facilitating confidence for exploration of the participants' thoughts and experiences. In addition, it has the clear advantage of enabling observation of interactive processes among participants. Focus groups were employed in my project to obtain information about the adaptation process in implementing the constructivist approach into online course designs based on collaboration between seven online tutors.

In fact, it was difficult to bring this group of people together, since they worked under a heavy load and had a busy schedule. In this respect, the significance of the research to participants' better working practice, and warm contacts helped me gain the perceptions and experiences of the seven tutors in collaborative course design.

Self-Report

Self-reports were another data collection technique in the research process. They helped gather data from fourteen online students in relation to the outcome of the research project. This data collection technique complemented the semi-structured interviews with the students in order to evaluate the outcomes of the constructivist based online course design on the skills development of the students.

The self-report took the form of self-evaluation of skills development of the students regarding the impact of constructivist based course design. The self-report included particular skills and a scaling activity which required rating those skills as none, low, adequate or high competence. This provided in-depth insights into skills development in line with the semi-structured interviews (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Cohen *et al.,* 2000).

Researcher Diary

I kept a research diary in my project as a technique to confirm or contradict findings from other sources. It is a valuable tool to collect qualitative data within the inductive process. It can include details of information about actions and behaviors and reveal perceptions of events and feelings relating to specific focuses (Altrichter *et al.,* 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

I used the diary to note details of every stage of the action research process. As the researcher diary is one type of document that provides information on critical incidents, the researcher recorded progress, feelings and insights about the research process to propose reasonable standards and to confirm interpretations of the data gathered from multiple data collection techniques.

Observation was another technique that could alternatively have been used. It entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors and objects in the social setting of the chosen study. This method assumes that behavior is purposeful and expressive of deeper values and beliefs. It is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings.

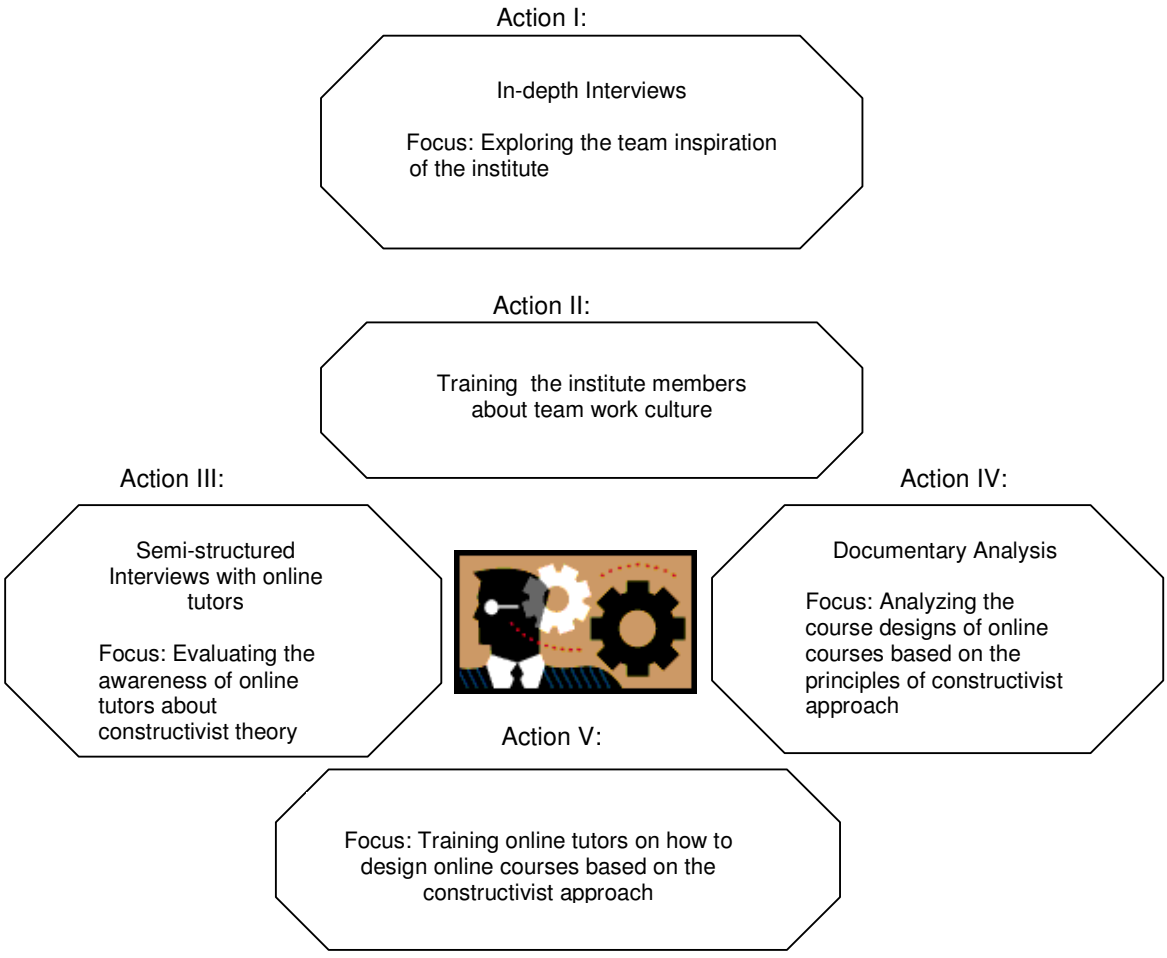
Observation is often used in qualitative inquiry. Through observational findings, the researcher can get primary data if he/she has good observation skills. According to Saunders *et al.* (2000), observation can be categorized as participant and structured

observations. In participant observations, the researcher attempts to participate fully in the event but employ systematic structured observation and quantify behaviors.

In spite of the strengths of this technique, it is time consuming and poses ethical dilemmas and role conflicts. Considering my online context it was inappropriate for my project. In this respect, the research diary made for a realistic alternative, covering my observations at every step of the research.

Figure 3 below, describes my action research process and justifies the chosen data collection techniques in relation to the specific focuses.

Inductive Process by Action Research: Justification of Data Collection Techniques



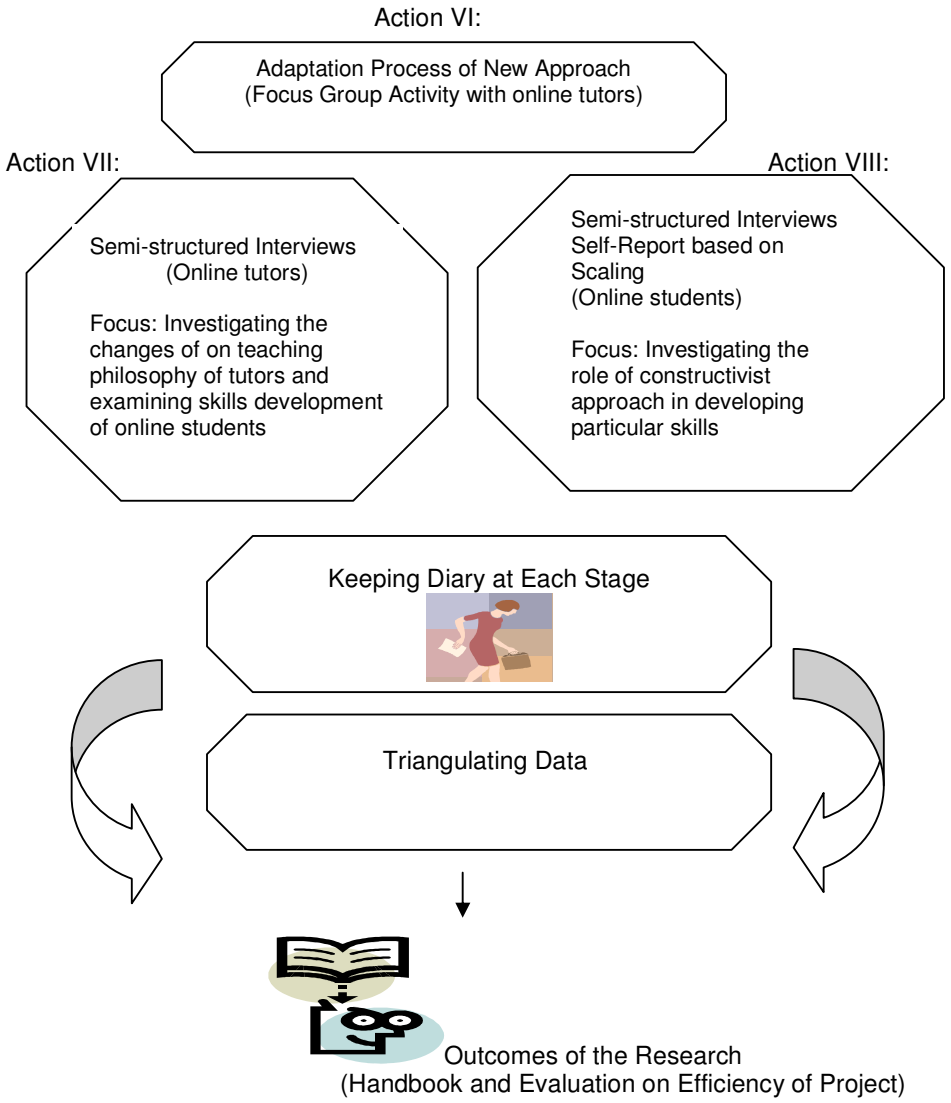


Figure 3. Inductive Process by Action Research: Justification of Data Collection Techniques.

3.8 Data Analysis and Triangulation

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data. Qualitative data analysis is the search among data to identify content for research questions and focus and establish truth (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

In addition, data analysis is also an inductive process in qualitative inquiry involving systematically searching and arranging the materials gathered to increase

understanding and transfer that understanding to others. In short, analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what to tell others (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

It is crucial to guard against failing to carry out a true analysis. Qualitative research considers meanings, values, experiences and it can be difficult to analyze those patterns (Bryman, 2004). In this respect, I paid attention to strategies in qualitative data analysis process which would provide a guarantee of data quality through using multiple data collection and data triangulation and cross-examination.

Qualitative research relies on an inductive process in which data illustrates meanings, and experiences are expressed through words. Qualitative data collection results in non-standardized data requiring classification into categories. Therefore, qualitative analysis is conducted through the use of conceptualization (Saunders *et al.,* 2000). Qualitative data analysis is stated to be both interpretive and eclectic in nature. Creswell (1994) describes data analysis in qualitative research process as follows:

> "In qualitative analysis, several simultaneous activities engage the attention of the researcher: collecting information from the field, sorting information into categories, formatting the information into a picture" (Creswell, 1994:153).

In addition, Creswell (1994) points out that reduction of data and interpretation are the key elements within the qualitative data analysis. In this research, the qualitative data was reduced and interpreted according to feasibility in the action research process. The research process included a series of actions based on action research and was participatory research through which people work towards the improvement of their own practice in an inductive learning cycle (Cohen *et al.,* 2000).

In this respect, I undertook conceptual analysis for the huge amount of data gathered from the multiple data collection techniques. Therefore, I considered basic themes

from the literature in relation to my research focus in order to interpret and analyze data in an inductive manner.

The basic themes of negotiation, knowledge sharing and collaboration for team work culture were examined to reveal the practice of team work culture within my working practice. In addition, the principles of the constructivist approach which consists of collaborative learning, communication, group work, diverse topics, course design materials, assignments and projects, and the proposing of multiple perspectives helped me understand and interpret the notions of the constructivist approach within online courses. These themes also became signposts to interpret the developing skills of the students within online learning and teaching process.

It is often said that there is no right way to analyze such voluminous data. Careful attention to how data were reduced was necessary throughout the research in terms of data management. Therefore, I undertook triangulation to manage the data view the collected data through a series of different lenses for the purpose of the investigation.

Silverman (2000) defines data triangulation in qualitative inquiry as follows:

> "Triangulation refers to the attempt to get a true fix on a situation by combining different ways of looking at it or different findings (Silverman, 2000:177).

In my research project, I conducted de-contextualization in order to reduce voluminous amount of information to certain patterns, categories, themes and then interpreted this information by using schema in relation to the research actions and their focuses. Using different data collection techniques to gain insights from each action provided a convergence among the sources of information which was difficult to manage and interpret. The data triangulation however helped better understand the concepts being explored and verify the findings for credible research (Creswell, 1994).

As part of the qualitative data analysis, I also conducted content analysis for my research project. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. Texts can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theater, informal conversation, or really any occurrence of communicative language.

To conduct a content analysis on any such text, the text is coded, or broken down, into manageable categories on a variety of levels--word, word sense, phrase, sentence, or theme--and then examined using one of content analysis' basic methods: conceptual analysis or relational analysis.

In my project, conceptual analysis was undertaken in that I set and categorized themes of actions in the research. In conceptual analysis, a concept is chosen for examination, and the analysis involves quantifying and tallying its presence. It is also known as thematic analysis in that it looks at the occurrence of selected terms within a text or texts, although the terms may be implicit as well as explicit (Saunders *et al.,* 2000; Bryman, 2004; Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008).

In my research project, I imposed order by categorizing data regarding to themes for each action and then included my own ideas and impressions within the research process. Triangulation compensated for weaknesses in individual data collection techniques and helped in the verification of the data for credible qualitative research. In this qualitative study, data collection and analysis typically go hand in hand to build a coherent interpretation of the data.

My research aimed to create awareness in institute members of committed decision making processes for course design and propose a sequence of actions to change the structure of course design in relation to the constructivist approach, thereby also contributing to the professional growth of participants during the research process.

Regarding the broader phases of the research project, the in-depth interview was an appropriate starting data collection technique to explore the awareness of Institute members regarding collaborative decision making process about course design. In-depth interviews helped me gather primary data on team work inspiration. As stated, the interviews ran for sixty minutes in order to gain in-depth meanings from Institute members' perceptions and experiences. The questions were open-ended and had been reviewed and piloted by experts.

The sixteen institute members participated in face to face exploratory interviews based on purposive sampling and aiming to find out what is happening and to seek new insights (Saunders *et al.,* 2000). I succeeded in managing access and permission in the work context; the questions were reviewed and piloted, thereby increasing the credibility and data quality. The process of interviewing started with permission, access and scheduling and was finalised with transcription and interpretation. During the process, I was flexible with regard to scheduling, and was careful not to attribute bias, values, and interpretations within the data analysis (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Wiesenberg and Stacey, 2005). I analyzed the data using content analysis based on conceptual analysis through specific themes based on coding and categories.

The second phase of my research project was the training which focused on creating awareness of team work within the Institute. I delivered the training in relation to contributions of collective decision making process to course design within the

Institute. The content of the training was reviewed by experts. My observations and experiences in this regard provided significant evidence in the analysis.

After the training, I conducted semi-structured interviews in order to evaluate the awareness of the twelve online tutors about the constructivist approach in course design. The aim of these face to face interactions was to obtain a large amount of data from online tutors in relation to the focus. The technique exploited specific organizational content relevant to my research focus (Saunders *et al.,* 2000:245). Thus, I had a list of themes and questions to be covered and the order of the questions varied depending on the flow of the conversation. The conversations with tutors were tape recorded.

In the data analysis process, I attempted content analysis to guide further steps by converting the qualitative data into quantitative categories. Data quality issues, researchers' interviewing competences, logistical and resource issues are possible challenges within semi-structured interviews. As with the in-depth interviews, I attempted to consider possible solutions to these possible challenges in advance (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Wiesenberg and Stacey, 2005).

Along with the semi-structured interviews; I attempted to review the structure of the online courses by gathering secondary data from the existing course designs. Reviewing the course designs as documents and as material culture helped compare and triangulate the semi-structured interview findings. In the course design analysis, researcher categories and coding of the themes about constructivist approach principles through a checklist provided the confidence to interpret the data (Curtis and Lawson, 2001; Whatley and Bell, 2003).

The next action proposed training to develop the insights of online tutors on the constructivist approach and its principles. This training was prepared for online tutors

to integrate this approach in their courses through negotiation and discussion with their colleagues. Again, the content of the training was reviewed by experts. The training facilitated the professional development of the tutors in terms of pedagogical knowledge.

After the training, there was an integration and adaptation process for the constructivist approach into online course designs. During this period of time, I used the focus group as a data collection technique in order to know what is happing and act immediately if anything did not work. The focus group was conducted with seven online tutors based on purposive sampling. Throughout the adaptation process, I used the focus group to create collaboration between tutors and discuss the adaptation process whilst considering possible further actions as a reflective, active researcher.

The focus group was the data collection technique through which collective interactions, and experiences of how social situations or events appeared to participants were gathered in a limited period of time. Focus groups are one type of the group interview with a formal setting, a directive role for the researcher, a structured questions format and an exploratory process. Focus groups are inexpensive to conduct and produce rich data. However, they are not without problems. I paid particular attention to the creation of groupthink among participants in order to generalize data in accuracy.

Content analysis as a form of conceptual analysis was used for data analysis in relation to the categories that were formed from the literature review. With the participants' permission, I taped the interviews in order to obtain a concrete record of their interactions.

After the integration and adaptation process, the next steps covered the outcomes of the change. I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven online tutors in this

regard. The interviews helped investigate changes in the teaching philosophy of the tutors and the skills development of the students. The structure of the semi-structured interviews was also reviewed by experts and piloted.

The interviews with the online tutors provided me with their reflections on changes in their teaching philosophy and skills development of online students through the new approach and enabled me to assess the success of the action plan (Peel and Shortland, 2004; Osborn and Theodore, 2005).

In order to further investigate the role of the constructivist approach based course design in developing the skills of students, I conducted semi-structured interviews for gathering primary data through face to face interactions with fourteen online students based on purposive sampling on a voluntary basis. The interviews helped gather large amounts of data about the experiences and perceptions of the students. The questions were reviewed by experts and piloted. I used conceptual content analysis for the data interpretation.

Parallel to the semi-structured interviews, I distributed self-reports based on scaling to online students to examine the development of particular skills. These self-reports provided primary data and were complementary to the semi-structured interviews. In addition, the self-reports revealed both interconnections and contradictions in the data from the semi-structured interviews.

The self-report scaling assessed skills as none, low, adequate or high. It was adapted from Bennett *et al.* (1999). The reports were analysed through themes emerging from my interpretation.

Within the research process, keeping a diary provided theoretical and practical insights about every step of action taken as a worker researcher (Rowley, 2003). I used triangulation to verify findings from the multiple data collection process. The

preparation of a handbook after an evaluation of my project constituted the creation of a coherent process to support quality improvements in my working practice. Figure 4 below illustrates the triangulation of data for the verification of qualitative data in the inductive process.

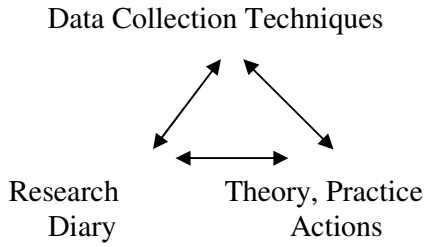


Figure 4. Triangulating Data.

Hubbard and Power (1993) simply describe triangulation in action research as the use of multiple sources to support findings. In my research data triangulation helped overcome the challenge of data quality from single source, and also manage and interpret the large amount of data arising from multiple data collection. The triangulation was key to the verification process. The collected data were analyzed through conceptual content analysis and I categorized the themes of actions according to each focus within the inductive process (Creswell, 1994; Verma and Mallick, 1999; Cohen *et al.,* 2000; Bryman, 2004).

3.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has detailed research philosophy, design, approach and procedures. For my research project qualitative research design was undertaken and an action research approach adopted in line with my research focus. Through the research design, it was possible to develop a richer, deeper understanding of online course design based on a constructivist approach and team work among online tutors in designing online courses.

I collected data from core members, online tutors and students in the Distance Education Institute. The collected data was analyzed through employing an inductively driven approach based on content analysis. I also outlined research access issues and ethical considerations within this chapter. Triangulation was emphasized in relation to multiple data collection techniques. I present the action research project activities and findings in the following chapters.

CHAPTER IV

PROJECT ACTIVITY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter of my project covers the project activities that were undertaken in participatory action research through four cycles with specific objectives to propose better working practice in my work context. It starts by giving details about the focus of my work based research project, my research context and my chosen research approach. The chapter then provides detailed explanations on each action research cycle with their specific objectives in my research project. Further to this, it discusses what actions I considered in my research and how I implemented these actions in the work based research project within the action research cycle. The chapter concludes with my evaluation of the action research process and my role as action researcher in my work based research project.

4.2 My Work-based Research Project

My project had a positive impact on the workplace by considering change and innovation in online practice. It is about making a difference, about examining what is and what ought to be and turning that into action. Therefore, my reflections are intended to stress what I do, why I do it and how I might change the circumstances of actions that lead to the solutions of my work setting problems.

In a project based on experiential learning and active experimentation, I played the role of both worker and researcher to provide insights into my institutional development and achieve success with my practical work. I had the chance to both work for my own professional development and develop my colleagues' knowledge and experiences of how to prepare and design online courses. (Middlesex University Module Guide Handbook, 2008).

My project mainly focuses on the creation of team work in the Distance Education Institute and on the role of course design based on a constructivist approach in developing critical thinking skills of online students. The project was based on implementing four cycles of participatory action research.

My work based research project targeted volunteer core members of the institute, and students as research participants. The online tutors were the key characters in that my project aimed to enhance their knowledge of how to collaboratively design online courses. I divided the online tutors into project teams depending on their subject fields, and experiences. In order to develop team spirit, these teams came together to negotiate the process of designing the online courses. Thirteen online tutors and the director of the Institute, technical staff and the director of the Tourism Department participated. There were four team projects in total. One of the teams had four online tutors with experience in teaching online courses and some 'unconscious' knowledge of implementing some principles of the constructivist approach. These tutors were from School of Tourism Hospitality and Architecture, Economics Departments. Another team had four online tutors from the English Preparatory School with no knowledge about constructivist based online course design. They participated in my research to gain insights for use in preparations for online English courses planned for the following year. The Tourism team meanwhile were candidate tutors for the online master degree program. They participated to gain insight into how to design constructivist based online courses and to extend their knowledge of teamwork activities. One tutor from the General Education Department also participated in the project, for similar reasons. Fourteen online students became part of my project in order to help evaluate the outcomes of the process.

As indicated in the previous chapters, my project was based on four action research cycles each with its own objectives and activities intended to reach those objectives. Each cycle included asking questions, collecting data, analyzing, reflecting, planning action steps and positive action for change as critical components as related to the specific objectives. Success was heavily dependent on careful evaluation of each phase, and, finally, on the reflection of the activity into enhanced institutional and professional development.

The four cycles in conjunction with the project activities developed collaboration and team work among the tutors in designing the online courses, and the integration and implementation of constructivist approach into online course designs. Deliberate actions within the research meanwhile enhanced their professional growth by providing pedagogical insights into how to design online courses and develop the skills of online students.

4.3 Getting Started

My project was a type of experiential learning. Hence, preparations and careful consideration of detail and strategy were essential prior to the commencement of the project. Getting started encompassed an in-depth literature review, preparation of data collection techniques and questions, designing a research package and developing communication links between research participants, consultants, colleagues and my supervisor, as well as scheduling meetings with the online tutors.

The networking began with a meeting with the Director of the Distance Education Institute and the sending of invitation letters to online tutors in order to give detailed information about my research project. These activities helped me gain access to my research context. I attempted to encourage voluntary participation of online tutors

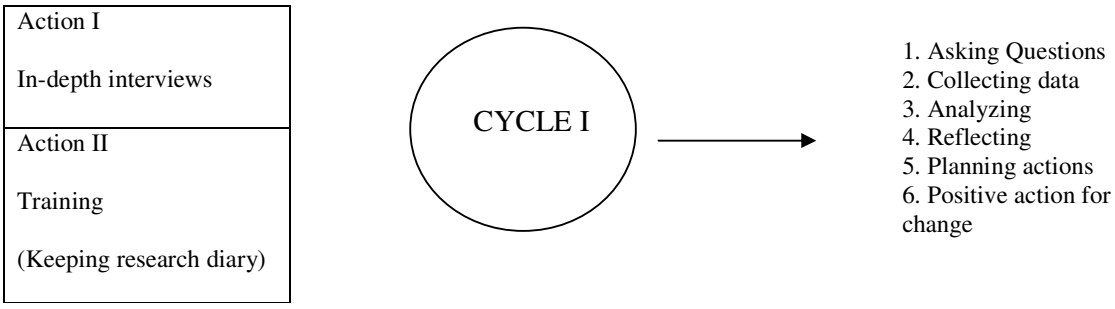
through phone conversations in which I tried to give detailed information about the aim of the research, and the significant roles of tutors within it.

After that I arranged face to face meetings with core members of institute in order to give them a research package which had been prepared as a guidebook to my research process. The package enabled me to ensure that online tutors were well informed about my research procedures. In addition, I secured agreement with core members about their participation in the research through the signing of participant information sheets (See Appendix B, p.187).

I further prepared a schedule of actions according to the four cycles in the participatory action research and informed the participants in advance in order to start the process in a planned and efficient manner as well as with the confidence of mutual agreement.

4.4 My Research Journey

Within the action research framework, four cycles were put into practice, each with specific objectives, strategic activities and feedback phase. In each cycle, I concentrated on asking questions, collecting data, analysing, reflecting, and planning actions and positive action for change as critical components of the cycle. This process is illustrated below:



Objective: Evaluating current situation and creating team work culture

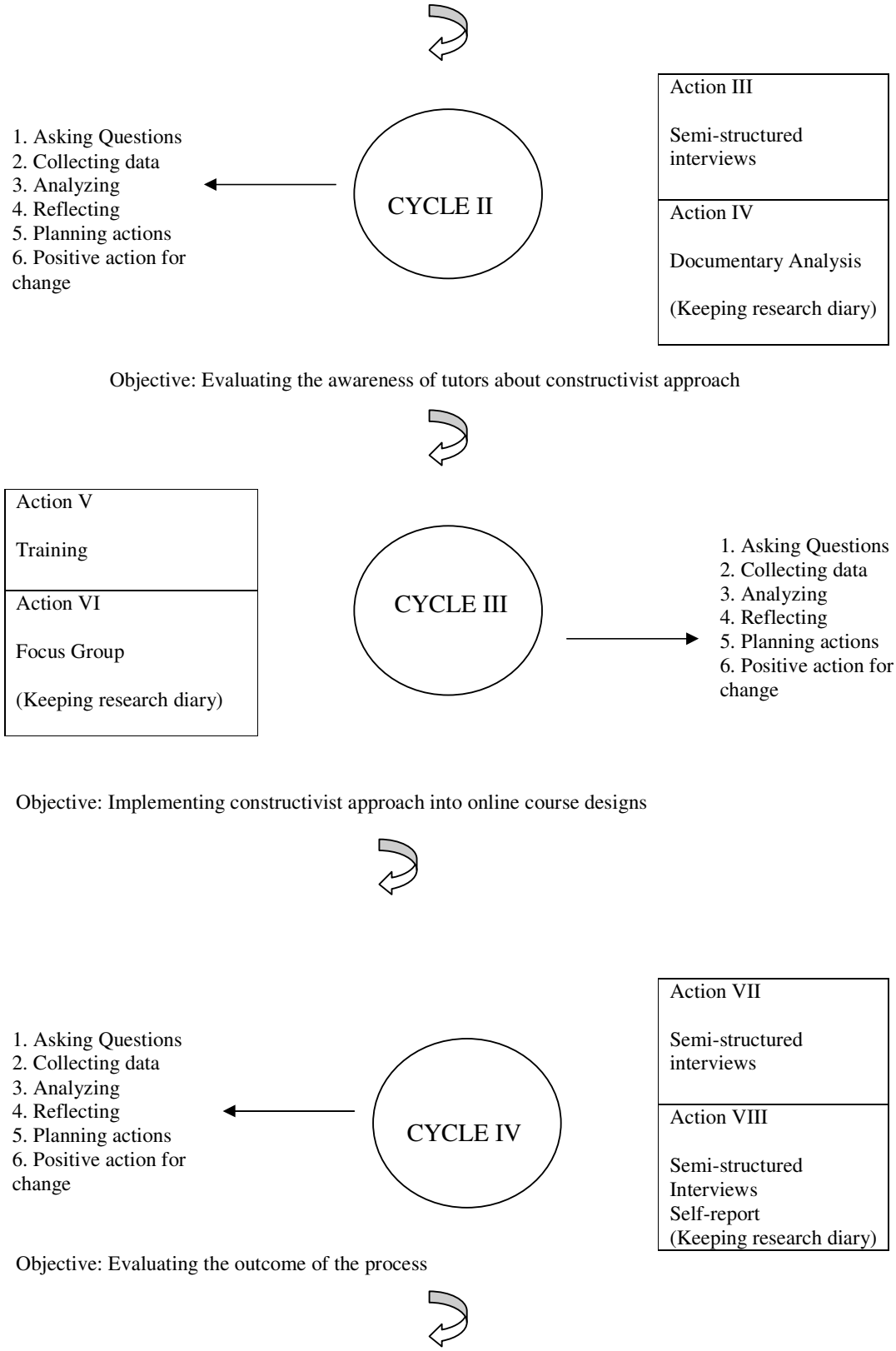


Figure 5. My Research Journey.

Throughout this chapter, I reflect on the objectives of the action research cycles, how the process worked, and what motivated or hindered my actions in completing my project in a constructive way.

Cycle I

The objective of this cycle was to explore team spirit in my work context and to create a team work culture for collaboration and commitment of core members in change and development. Regarding this objective, I conducted in-depth interviews with the core members who had volunteered to be part of the project.

In-depth interviews provided the opportunity to ask questions in order to understand what was happening and to collect data to confirm the realities. Reflective analysis regarding the in-depth interviews helped plan further action, specifically training to enhance awareness of team work culture and create that culture within the work context. Thus both the training and the feedback on its effectiveness constituted positive action for change. Cycle I thus included in-depth interviews and training as two distinct activities for reaching the specific objectives of this cycle. These two activities are now examined in more detail:

Action I: In examining the team work culture of the Distance Education Institute for collaborative decision making while designing online courses, in-depth interviews were chosen as a data collection technique. Through this technique, I aimed to collect data, and analyze to what extent the Institute displayed teamwork and collaboration in the design of online courses.

Therefore, in-depth interview questions were designed, considering dimensions of teamwork including customer and inter-team issues, roles and interdependence, communication and conflict management, team member skills, clarity of team goals, decision-making authority and accountability, and support from the organization. Nine

questions were prepared based on an in-depth literature review and these questions were piloted and reviewed by two experts to ensure validity and reliability (See Appendix C, p.189). Sixteen institute members participated. These were the director of the Institute, technical staff, one tutor from Economics, one tutor from Architecture, the director of Tourism and Hospitality Management, four tutors from Tourism and Hospitality Management, one tutor from General Education Department, and five tutors from the English Preparatory School.

This first action was the critical step in terms of creating a successful communication flow during my research process. As a base line measurement for my research project, it was significant to know about the perceptions and experiences of the institute's members regarding team work and team spirit in order to construct knowledge and further develop a team-based environment. Although it was a challenge to schedule an appropriate date and time for the interviews, having warm contacts with participants, and providing information about the process through the research packages proved to be successful strategies.

The sixty minute interviews comprised nine exploratory questions. These questions aimed to explore how members defined team work in their work setting, how they came together to decide on courses, how decision-making process worked and what they thought about the advantages of team work within the Institute. I was happy to see the willingness of each participant to propose change and development for working practice and this in itself enhanced my own dedication to the project. At this early stage, the experience of conducting participatory action research and being a worker researcher was still new and challenging for me, so this early success was an important element in providing the foundation for change, development and better working practice.

Action II: The second action involved training to create awareness of team work and establish a team work culture within the Institute, particularly in designing online courses with a new approach. The training aimed to encapsulate the broadening of knowledge and development of practice of online tutors regarding how to collaboratively design their courses within their project teams (See Appendix D, p.190).

For the training, I prepared an information package which explained teamwork, decision making processes and project and a powerpoint presentation. These documents were reviewed by experts prior to use. Further to this, I prepared a feedback form including five questions to appraise the contributions of the training and to determine whether online tutors gained knowledge about how to be a project team (See Appendix E, p.200).

I delivered the training to institute members on the basis of certain key themes. These themes mainly covered what team work is, how members need to work together in decision-making processes and how team projects function to propose change and development. Informal conversations with members created confidence that they became more aware of changing practice and developing professional learning through collaborative practice.

The training was delivered to the different target groups, or project teams. The training to the online tutors had the nature of a meeting. The provision of a cocktail also created a warm atmosphere for the research and put the participants in a positive frame of mind.

Firstly, I delivered training to the four experienced tutors in the meeting room of the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management. In this meeting, I explored in depth the responsibilities of project teams and established a meeting schedule for these

members. These four experienced tutors welcomed the prospect of working together and underlined that training provided great contributions to them in order to meet, delegate and collaborate for better working performance.

After that, I conducted training with the five tutors of the English Preparatory School who proposed to open online courses and programme for the next year. This training was conducted in the meeting room of the English Preparatory School. They showed willingness to be part of the training in order to extend their knowledge of being in a project team and develop a team work culture as an online tutor committee. There was much discussion and negotiation among the tutors as to how to construct team work and collaboration in online course design and delivery. It was thus a productive meeting which developed both awareness and knowledge.

The next training session was delivered to the Tourism and Hospitality Management Department whose new online master degree programme and new online courses were scheduled to open the following year. This training was also conducted in the meeting room of the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management. The director and five tutors participated in the training.

The tutor from the General Education department and the Institute director, and technical staff were also informed about the insights on teamwork culture for course design emerging from the training. During the training, I distributed files to the participants including pencil, powerpoint slides, and the training feedback form motivating them to turn their attention to “what is happening and what will be” with regard to the steps to follow.

The project team training was a reflective process in which to evaluate the current team work culture and construct new ways of understanding team work and collaboration for online course design. Therefore, the reflections on how to work

together were an initial success in transferring knowledge and promoting professional learning through participatory action research.

Cycle II

The objective of this cycle was to evaluate the awareness of online tutors about the constructivist approach. Regarding this objective, I conducted semi-structured interviews with online tutors. In line with the semi-structured interviews, I did documentary analysis of online course design to complement the data from the semi-structured interviews.

Before conducting the interviews and documentary analysis, an extended literature review of the principles of the constructivist approach and suggested competencies of online tutors helped me understand what was happening in the online courses within my own context. The semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis enabled me to collect data and analyze, interpret and reflect on reality in useful and meaningful way, as a precursor to positive action for change.

The following section describes the activities implemented and how the objectives of cycle II were accomplished:

Action III: This action helped me examine the awareness of the tutors about the constructivist approach and was critical in the rationale of my project and its importance for my working practice.

I conducted semi-structured interviews in order to evaluate the awareness of online tutors about the constructivist approach while designing their online courses. I designed the interview questions considering the principles of constructivism from the literature. I designed fourteen questions which were piloted and reviewed by experts (See Appendix F, p.202).

Before conducting these semi-structured interviews with online tutors, I faced the challenge of finding an appropriate time and date for the face to face meetings. It was a hard process for me to persuade and arrange the exact time and date for the meeting as at this point the tutors were complaining about huge workloads and course schedules. They also showed unwillingness to be involved in semi-structured interviews due to the subject. After a week long struggle to arrange the interviews, I observed and understood through informal conversations that the problem was that the tutors were not confident with the constructivist approach and lacked the knowledge to practice this approach in online course design. The semi-structured interview process thus proved to be a milestone in my research action, since it showed in very strong terms the significance of my project.

The semi-structured interviews were approximately thirty minutes long and ran for three weeks with tutors from different departments. I visited each tutor in their office.

The four experienced tutors involved in my semi-structured interviews had more confidence and awareness about online course delivery even when they had a lack of knowledge regarding constructivism and how to prepare and design online courses.

Then, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the five tutors of the English Preparatory School. Before I conducted these interviews, all these tutors underlined that they had no preliminary idea about the constructivist approach and asked for training and help on how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach.

This provided a concrete example of the significance of evaluating awareness of tutors and then delivering training to help them construct knowledge on contemporary standards in online education. The two representative tutors from the Tourism and Hospitality Management Department were also involved in semi-structured interviews.

Although this department was in the initial stages of opening a new programme for a master's degree and online courses, I attempted to evaluate awareness and current perceptions of tutors on how to prepare and design online course based on the constructivist approach. These volunteer tutors also demanded training and help in online course design.

Finally, I conducted a semi-structured interview with one tutor from the General Education Department. This tutor had prior knowledge of the constructivist approach from the traditional classrooms and was willing to express thoughts and discuss experiences. I observed that the semi-structured interviews created willingness and interest in the tutors. Thus, this action provided a start to the learning cycle in that the tutors had started to get involve in change and consider how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach.

Action IV: In line with the semi-structured interviews and the cycle II objective, I also conducted documentary analysis. The documentary analysis helped confirm the results of the semi-structured interviews. I prepared a checklist to analyze the course designs of online tutors based on the principles of the constructivist approach. This checklist was derived from the suggestions of professionals and the relevant literature. This checklist was also piloted and reviewed by experts (See Appendix G, p.203).

During the semi-structured interviews, I examined the tutors' online courses to establish whether they attempted to use principles of the constructivist approach in their courses. This helped me to cross-check the awareness of tutors about the constructivist approach from the interviews.

To do this, I got official permission from the tutors and the Institute to enter each online course. Although getting official permission took time and effort, the Institute provided a password to me in order to follow course activities. Due to the nature of

authority and the centralized system within the university, it was hard to get official sanction immediately for implementing the process. However, after receiving it, I analyzed the design of four online courses put together by the experienced tutors from Tourism and Hospitality Management, Economics, and Architecture Departments.

The other tutors could not be part of this action since only four courses were then currently active. Therefore, the courses ARCH 329 (History and Culture of Cyprus), ECON 431 (Gender and Development), TOUR 509 (Contemporary Issues in International Hospitality and Tourism Management), and TOUR 506 (Financial Management in Tourism and Hospitality Management) were analyzed.

For the analysis, I evaluated twenty-five criteria on the principles of the constructivist approach, focusing on course objectives, learning activities and outcomes, learning resources, grading, assignments, learning and teaching methods, relationship with life and other courses, and communication links.

Whilst analyzing the courses, I faced technical problems entering courses and being online for a long time period. To overcome this, I delegated technical staff in order to deal with technical problems in online courses and provide scheduled technical training to online tutors to solve problems immediately. This provided both tutors and myself with valuable technical knowledge and contributed to our professional learning.

Cycle III

The objective of this cycle in my work based research project was to implement the constructivist approach into online course design in my work context. Regarding this objective, I planned and delivered training to the online tutors about how to prepare and design online courses based on the principles of the constructivist approach.

At the end of the training, feedback forms of the tutors helped me understand how the training had worked and what further action was required for positive change. After

the training, the process of implementing this new approach into online courses commenced.

During this phase, I conducted focus group activity which led me to be proactive in providing immediate feedback and guidance to online tutors while they were implementing the new approach. My reflections on the training and focus group activity regarding the objective of cycle III are as follows.

Action V: Training was the first action in the cycle III and aimed to increase the awareness of online tutors on how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach. This was definitely productive to the participants and to myself in terms of learning and constructing new knowledge in a collaborative atmosphere.

The training provided participants with the opportunity to learn from each other and gain new perspectives on how to prepare and design online courses through negotiation and discussions with their colleagues. Before delivering the training, I prepared detailed information about constructivist pedagogy, principles and constructivist based course design to present participants in a research package.

I also prepared powerpoint handouts for online tutors in order to encourage them to take notes and write down questions during my presentation. The material was reviewed by experts to ensure that it was relevant and valuable to participants (See Appendix D, p.190).

Further to this, I prepared a feedback form comprising four questions to evaluate the contributions of the training. This feedback form significantly helped me evaluate whether online tutors gained insights from the training on how to design their online courses based on the constructivist approach (See Appendix E, p.200).

Action VI: The sixth action comprised group interviews which aimed to evaluate what was happening during the adaptation process of implementing the constructivist approach into online course design. In particular, it was important to analyze the initial impact of constructivist based course design on the learning and skills development of students and the advantages of the action learning process for the professional growth of online tutors regarding constructivist approach based online pedagogy. I prepared three group interview questions in consultation with professionals (See Appendix H, p.204).

The interviews were held in the Tourism and Hospitality Management Department meeting room and the three questions were the basis for analyzing the process and to establish what action should be taken in the case of any problem during the adaptation process. The questions covered what actions helped or hindered the implementation of the constructivist approach, what tutors thought was the preliminary impact of this approach on the learning and skills development of students, and what tutors thought were the advantages of being involved in action learning for professional growth.

For the focus group activity, I targeted seven tutors who delivered online courses in the 2008-2009 Spring Academic Semester. These tutors included four from Tourism and Hospitality Management, one from General Education, one from Economics, and one from the Architecture Department.

Within a warm and friendly atmosphere, the volunteer tutors actively responded to the focus group questions and were very happy to share what they learned and implemented and how they became successful in the implementation of the new approach.

In the focus group, the tutors had the chance to share their experiences with their colleagues. At the same time, they negotiated and found solutions to problems. To give

a concrete example, they shared the idea of using a learning portfolio and established a mutual understanding that portfolios can be a very good way of motivating students and enhancing learning. The focus group activity thus enabled tutors to give suggestions to each others and to learn what others had gained from the process. This helped me understand how the reflections of tutors could drive the action research and learning process. After the focus group activity, I visited the research participants to give them an incentive in order to thank them for their contributions to my research process and motivate them in further actions.

Cycle IV

The objective of this cycle was to evaluate the outcomes of implementing the constructivist approach into online course designs in terms of developing the learning and skills of online students. In relation to this objective, I prepared semi-structured interviews for both volunteer online students and tutors.

In addition to this, I prepared a self-report based on scaling in order to obtain the reflections of the online students regarding the same specific objective. The semi-structured interviews and self-reports of the online students were the data collection techniques for me to collect data, analyze, interpret and reflect on the outcomes. These outcomes would help me in the planning of further action such as the dissemination of project results to professionals and preparing academic papers as further positive support for changes in the academic agenda.

The impact of cycle IV is considered further below:

Action VII: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven online tutors who implemented the constructivist approach into their course design. The interviews were intended to investigate changes in teaching philosophy of tutors and examine the skills development of the online students.

I prepared eleven questions for the semi-structured interviews with tutors. (See Appendix I, p.205). These questions aimed to confirm the outcomes of the project in relation to the role of course design in developing the learning and skills of online students. The eleven questions in the semi-structured interviews elicited information about changes in the teaching philosophy of online tutors in relation to practice of constructivist online pedagogy and its principles. The questions covered how the tutors designed their online courses after the training, what components of the courses motivated students to learn better, what learning activities were considered, how a collaborative learning environment was established, which skills of the students were targeted for development, and how they assessed student performance.

The first semi-structured interviews were conducted with the four tutors in Tourism and Hospitality Management who had delivered department courses during the semester. I visited each of the tutors in their offices for the interviews. These interviews were conducted on the same day at different times and places.

Tutors were very pleased to respond. They expressed their feelings and thoughts about the project and stated that they had gaining much pedagogical insight from my research process. Each of the tutors submitted research packages to me.

I then conducted interviews with the tutors in the Economics, Architecture and General Education Departments. These tutors also showed a willingness to reflect on the changes in their teaching philosophy. At the end of the interviews, the tutors stated how pleased they had been to be part of the project. The tutors also submitted their research packages with their participant information sheets and consent forms.

Action VIII: The final phase involved semi-structured interviews and self-reports based on a student scaling activity aiming to investigate the role of course design in

developing transferable skills in online students. The scaling system was adapted from Bennet *et al.* (1999) (See Appendix J, p.206).

I prepared twelve questions for the semi-structured interview with volunteer online students from seven different courses in order to examine skills development (See Appendix K, p.207). The challenge in this stage was to locate online students who had not had regular classroom meetings with tutors during the semester. The tutors helped me overcome this challenge by asking volunteer participants to the research process. For each course, two students involved in the research process responded to the semi-structured interviews and self-reports. Thus, in total, fourteen students contributed to this stage of the project.

What was interesting was how excited and interested the students were to understand how and why I conducted this research project. They were extremely happy to be part of the project. Before conducting the interviews and getting the self-report responses, I delivered orientation for each student on what the research aimed to achieve, and how the research process functioned with the help of the course instructors. This helped all participants towards a mutual understanding. In addition, each participant filled and signed participant information sheets and consent forms. Finally, in informal conversations, the participants stated their pleasure at being involved in the process. Although this stage was difficult to complete, it was very productive in gathering data about the investigation.

Research Diary

My research diaries provided reflections on the process and my research experiences. It also helped triangulate data and confirm the validity and reliability of the data and findings. In my diary, the research actions were explored in order. The diary began with the preparation process and the drafting of my introduction, extended literature

review and methodology. At the same time, I provided reflections on what the preparation process contributed to my professional learning, and mapped out further strategic action according to the literature review and methodology. I also explored my contacts and communications with advisors, consultants and stakeholders. This process enhanced both my research skills and my communication skills, and I realized that my DProf journey was part of a life-long learning experience of benefit both to myself, and, hopefully, to other researchers.

In the second part of the diary, I kept extended notes about the preparation of data collection techniques and the ongoing networking with participants, consultants and advisor. The preparations of data collection techniques, and in particular the reviewing and piloting of questions were the most difficult stages. I rewrote the questions three times during the reviewing and piloting phases. The questions were reviewed by two experts and then finalized. The research package for participants in the meantime included the aim, significance and actions of the project as well as the consent forms.

With the distribution of the package to the participants, I got deeper insight on the importance of ethics and the importance of conducting preliminary meetings and conversations with participants during distribution of research package to explain how the research process worked. I reflected on the skills I developed in my research diary. These skills can be listed as adaptation, communication, delegation and high level responsibility for leadership.

The third part of my diary included my reflections on the research in relation to the four cycles of the action research approach. I concentrated the on eight actions that my research project covered. The first action - in-depth interviews with the institute's members regarding team practice and spirit revealed that team culture was lacking, and

that the participants had little prior experience of working together for change and development.

In action two, which was training on teamwork culture, I reflected on the constructive nature of developing a teamwork creating culture of teamwork and how it laid the grounds for further development of both the project and institutional development. I noted that by the end of the training, participants were extremely willing to work together for change and development.

Action three was the semi-structured interviews to examine the awareness of the constructivist approach. The limited data from participants showed that tutors had limited knowledge and experience of constructivism in online courses. Informal conversations confirmed the problem. Documentary analysis was employed to investigate the same aim in action three, and largely confirmed that tutors had little prior knowledge of how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach.

My diary reflections confirmed that the collected data and observations from my research process had relevance and interrelations in terms of interpreting the data in a valid and reliable way. The reflections confirmed the necessity for action five, which was training for increasing the awareness of constructivism in online course design.

During this action, I noted that the participants were very pleased and excited to be learning about the new approach and integrating it into their course design. This also confirmed that the training was very productive and it motivated me to expand these collaborative learning skills. The semi-structured interviews to students and self-reports based on scaling further showed the development of collaboration and autonomy in the teaching-learning process.

In finalizing the project, I attempted to evaluate the efficiency of the project based on the feedback of the online tutors. In this stage, participants reflected on their experiences about the research process and its impact on change and development for better working practice. The feedback form was signed by participants to verify mutual understanding the data interpretation. I then prepared a handbook from my project and distributed it to the participants to disseminate my work. The journey had proved to be a memorable and productive first experience of conducting action research.

Feedback on the Success of the Four Cycles: Efficiency of My Project

After practicing four cycles of participatory action research, it was the time to finalize the research project. As stated, I prepared feedback forms signed by the participants to evaluate the success of the four cycles and efficiency of my project and confirm mutual understandings of the process (See Appendix L, p.208). I disseminated my project outcomes through presentations to both stakeholders and the public. Furthermore, certificates of participation were awarded to the research participants by the Distance Education Institute in recognition of the success of the project.

4.5 Self Appraisal on Action Research

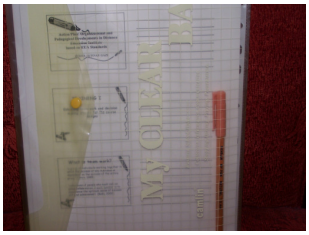
Participatory action research is a collaborative effort. My research project provided a good example of the change and development within working practice that can result, and was one that could be shared with other higher education institutions for change and development of their own online education practices. The research journey provided professional learning and experience to both myself and the participants. This was the ultimate reward of the project.

The success of action research cycles depend on collaborative efforts of the participants. This was my first experience of participatory action research, and was thus extremely challenging. However the efforts and enthusiasm of all concerned led

to collaboration for better working practice. This collaborative process provided in-depth insights into action research and expanded knowledge on how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach. The research also enabled me to further develop project management, leadership, communication and research skills. The research diary and writing up of the project showed that reflection is a crucial skill in putting the life-long learning process into reality. Using an action research approach also helped made me understand the role of the worker researcher and grasp the essences of work based learning.

I carried out my project with a high level of responsibility. In this respect, I created a research atmosphere based on collaborative efforts that provided pedagogical development and professional learning experiences to the participants. The process is illustrated below:

All efforts are coming together…



Allocating Resources

Research Knowledge

Managing Own Learning

Critical Analysis

Ethics

Self-Reflection

High Level of Responsibility

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I critically analyze, interpret and discuss the findings of my work based research project. The participatory action research cycle provided a map for the data collection enabling me to record patterns of thoughts, experiences and perceptions through an inductive process. In specific, creating a team work culture in working practice for change and development in relation to online course design and the role of the constructivist approach in designing online courses are critically discussed. Key themes regarding project teams for better working practice, and constructivist principles in designing online courses are also considered and interpreted in this chapter.

In my research, content analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data within an inductive process regarding the revealing the qualitative meanings of my findings. I coded and broke down qualitative data into manageable categories based on themes, thus using thematic analysis to enable me to analyse, highlight and underline the key themes in a qualitative way (Marra *et al.,* 2004; Altinay and Parakevas, 2008).

In collecting and analysing the data from the in-depth interviews, trainings, semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, focus group and self-reports, I set the conceptual themes as follows:

- Dimensions of team work in working practice
- Online course design elements
- Principles of the constructivist approach in online course design

- Skills that are fostered or limited by the constructivist approach in online learning

Regarding these basic themes, negotiation, collaboration and knowledge sharing are the significant factors of the dimension of team work that were considered while analyzing the team work culture of the institute.

Learning activities, projects, the guidance of tutors and communication were the key factors in evaluating online course design. Further to this, collaborative learning, group work, discussion and multiple perspectives in online courses embodied the principles of the constructivist approach as basic themes within the process. These themes also demonstrated how team work, communication, critical analysis skills can be developed in online learning.

Hence, dimensions of team work, elements of course design, principles of the constructivist approach and skills in online learning comprised the framework for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data through an inductive process.

In this section, I have attempted to make sense of the data gathered during the participatory action research and interpret and present them in a meaningful and useful way in order to provide conclusions and indicate some of the implications of my project.

5.2 Presentation of Research Findings

Creating a Team Work Culture in My Working Practice

In order to examine to what extent the Institute displayed a team-based approach to collaborative decision making in online course design, I conducted in-depth interviews with institute members as a base line measurement within cycle 1 of my project. The in-depth interviews showed evidence of the current situation of the institute and had a significant role in creating awareness of the importance of team work within the

Institute. In-depth interview findings revealed that the participants were aware of the importance of team work and commitment to facilitate better working practice.

Although participants accepted that they had to work together satisfactorily in order to achieve synergy, they also felt that the Institute's attempts to improve quality had not sufficiently addressed the need for regular meetings, collaborative tasks and monitoring of institutional activity.

On the other hand, the in-depth interviews also showed that the Director and technical staff of the Institute were committed to carrying out research projects for institutional development, thus showing that the basis for quality improvement within the Institute was in place.

One of the tutors stated that "The Institute is preparing strategic plan outlining quality improvement activities where collaboration will be the basis of monitoring quality improvement". Another tutors stressed: "Even if there are no improvements and even if there is a loss of enthusiasm, we still need to have meetings every semester". Significantly though, the participants agreed that the Institute had insufficient activities to improve quality in terms of forming project teams to drive better working practice. They stressed that projects such as mine could play an important role in stimulating collaboration for quality development of the Institute.

The director and technical staff stated that there were sufficient communication links between members. In fact, although tutors from the same department were in communication with each other and collaborated to some extent, there was little evidence of team spirit in true institutional terms. One of the participants stated: "we have no connection, we have no contact with members". One of the participants from the English Preparatory School stressed: "as a team we are still coming together".

The participants described team work in many ways:

"Coming together for the Institute as tutor, faculty staff and the students"

"Project teams for completing tasks"

"Establishing contacts to change and develop the situation"

"Cooperation of people"

"Coming together from different backgrounds and working on issues".

"Sharing responsibilities, being part of the puzzle".

Nearly all participants could define team work and project teams, however their experience of team work culture within working practice was minimal. They were able to see though that collaborative work not only increases the professionalism of the researcher, but also the organisation's members and the quality of task fulfilment and decision-making processes.

The findings supported the idea that there was a need to consider change in course design with the involvement of instructors. However, the findings also revealed that although tutors nominally agreed on the importance of team work in online course designs, they were also practising course design on an individual basis. The evidence showed that there was no collaborative decision making process in online course design in my own work context.

The participants did though stress that working as a team is a different culture which provides opportunities to share experiences with other tutors, benchmark yourself, and gain confidence about your efforts in your course design. In this respect, all the participants stated that there was a need for training in order to gain insights on how to work collaboratively in online course design.

In line with the in-depth interviews, my experiences and observation as reflected in my research diary confirmed that the institute had not developed sufficient team-based

inspiration to develop and monitor quality improvement activities, and to share, negotiate and transfer knowledge among staff. Table I illustrates the dimensions of team work according to my observations as an insider researcher.

Table I. The Evaluation on Team Work Dimensions

Team Work Dimensions	Comments
Customer and Interteam Issues	Institute members could not be active on customer and interteam issues because of not having regular meetings and contacts. In addition, interteams could not be constructed.
Roles and Interdependence	Institute members have no clarified roles within a team. Everyone within the institute is allowed to work independently.
Communication and Conflict Management	There are not enough communication links between colleagues, which limits collegial activities. Tutors who are in the same department have communication and collaboration, whereas tutors who are in different departments, have no contacts. Institute members solve any conflict with the Director and the technical staff on an individual basis.
Team Member Skills	Since there is no team work culture within the Institute, team member skills could not be clarified.
Clarity of Team Goals	Although the Institute is trying to develop a strategic plan in line with the mission and goals of the institution, it does not foster clarity of team goals to work on this plan.
Decisions Authority and Accountability	The director is open and flexible for change and development. The Director has enthusiasm to share decisions with members.
Support from Organization	Although the Director provides support to members on an individual basis, there is insufficient support to project teams.

After gathering the data on teamwork, the training in cycle 1 aimed to inform institute members what team work is, and how members needed to work together with regards to decision-making processes for online course design. The training thus aimed to create awareness of team work culture and build project teams to develop the online courses. The training was thematic and aimed to develop the knowledge and experience of core members about dimensions of team work and functions of project teams in a healthy working practice.

I had an important leadership role in terms of forming project teams and encouraging them to work together for the promotion of better working performance. The feedback provided significant evidence of the outcomes, participants stating that they were highly satisfied to be involved in training which gave them insights on what team work is and how they could work together on online course design.

As team work requires learning how to develop knowledge, share information, and build on each other's knowledge to create new knowledge and new models, rather than simply adapting the models already existing, participants gained in-depth understanding on why team work is important for institutional success. The feedback forms elicited the reflections and evaluations of the participants regarding the training on creating a team work culture. The participants agreed that the training helped them understand the importance of each individual's contribution to the collaborative decision making process. One of the participants reported that: "it helped me to identify my place in the team, it gave a clear idea about the decision making process". Another stated: "I have found an opportunity to learn more about team work and decision making mechanisms in the online course design system". A third participant underlined that the: "training provided insights on the essence of team work in pedagogical aspects of online education". Another added that the training provided in-depth understanding of how team work was essential for successful practice of online education within the institute. A further comment was that: "training contributed motivation and understanding of the action research process".

Participants made a number of different statements about the contribution of training to team work skills:

> "Coming together, working together and thinking in a harmony"
>
> "Producing a product through working together"

"Sharing, exchanging knowledge"

"Coordinating and taking a high level of responsibility"

"Negotiating and collaborating based on active involvement"

"Making shared decisions"

The training thus made a major contribution to members to working together, negotiating, and sharing knowledge and thereby developing professionally within the project teams. My observations in my research diary further confirmed the impact of the training on team work culture within the institute and the growing realisation that the Institute could be developed by the collaborative efforts of the staff.

Principles of the Constructivist Approach in Online Courses

Evaluating the awareness of tutors regarding the constructivist approach was the main objective of cycle 2 in my participatory action research. In this respect, I conducted semi-structured interviews with online tutors as a base line measurement.

My findings from the semi-structured interviews revealed that the online tutors had no clear idea or experience of the constructivist approach and its implementation into online courses. Indeed, the limited data from the interviews in itself showed the need to conduct training to help them how to prepare and design online course based on constructivist approach.

Chow and Yong (2005) point out that online courses facilitate learning by promoting taking responsibility for one's own learning within a framework involving collaboration and social interaction. This develops critical analysis, communication and team work skills. The online tutors agreed that there is difference between online teaching and traditional teaching, and that tutors and students need to take a higher level of responsibility in the former. At the same time, nearly all the online tutors stressed that they didn't have 'names' for the teaching strategies or philosophies they

drew on while teaching and designing online courses. One of the participants remarked: “I don’t know if it is strategy but I try to keep contact with students”.

Another participant stated: “my strategy is to give them guidance rather teach them”. The online tutors had some difficulty in expressing what ‘learner focused’ really meant in online education. One of the participants stated: “It is hard to me to define, I never thought of the idea of being learner focused”. The tutors did however agree that the issue was at least not complicated by any major cultural differences between the largely Turkish student population.

Drawing on discussions by Hughes and Daykin (2002), Ausburn (2004), and Combe (2005) on online course design elements, the tutors mentioned that readings, assignments, and projects within their online courses motivated students to learn better. Tutors attempted to use email, face to face meetings and discussion boards as communication tools in the courses, but there was a general feeling that the communication tools of the program were not functioning well.

One of the participants stressed: “I don’t have a chat programme, the institute is not opening the chat programme every week. I could use other facilities”. In addition, online tutors agreed that students made little voluntary use of the online communication tools and that they needed face to face meeting with their tutors.

On the other hand, the tutors did feel that the students took a high level of responsibility within the online learning process. One of the participants summarized: “I did experience this and the results of the exams is better than the classroom exams, so I was surprised - they did perfectly”. Comments by tutors on the collaborative element were many and varied:

> “There is no collaboration in the course, it is completely individual based”
>
> “Collaboration is not sufficient, the motivation for collaboration is low, when you ask students to come together it is problem”

"Not much, I did not have much collaboration"

"Peers work together for the projects"

The online tutors underlined that they needed further effort and training to design their online courses in order to encourage students to think, reflect and understand the subjects, and negotiate with others to transfer their learning into real world experiences. One of the participants stressed: "These are the things that I am trying to do". Another participant stated that tutors need to be supportive for the students to help them construct learning and experience during the online learning process.

Regarding student engagement with diverse topics or subjects of research during the online courses, the tutors underlined that students study different topics and do projects in order to interrelate real world subjects with course content. However, although the tutors attempted to introduce diverse topics and research within their courses in relation to notions of the constructivist approach in online courses, they were not highly satisfied with the practice.

Turning to assessment practice, it was clear that tutors considered product rather than process in evaluating student performance. Tutors discussed assessment of student performance in the following terms:

"Exams are very important, we had several quizzes"

"I always apply the same grading system, this is how we do it"

"Assessment is part of administration decisions"

"It is very important and difficult to assess the process"

According to the semi-structured interview findings, I can underline that the online tutors were willing to guide students to learn better in their online courses. However, they simply had insufficient knowledge and experience on preparing and designing online courses based on online pedagogy.

I conducted documentary analysis in order to triangulate the findings on the awareness of tutors about the constructivist approach within the frame of cycle 2 in my participatory action research process. Through this analysis, I was able to increase the richness of the data and construct a "full picture" of the focus. In total I analyzed four online course designs according to the principles of the constructivist approach (Duffy and Jonassen, 1992; Huang, 2002; Ausburn, 2004). These courses were TOUR 506 (Financial Management in Tourism and Hospitality Management), TOUR 509 (Contemporary Issues in International Tourism and Hospitality Management), ECON 431 (Gender and Development), and ARCH 329 (History and Culture of Cyprus).

Although these course designs proposed course aims, objective and learning outcomes for informing students about the process, students' prior knowledge, cultural differences, and individual differences were not taken into account. In addition, these courses targeted only a relatively small group of students in terms of delivering a curriculum based on a learner focused education philosophy.

The courses did not seem to encourage active engagement of the students in their learning process. Significantly, the ARCH 329 course design suggested student use of communication tools with regard to tutor motivation and guidance. The other courses did not promote interactive communication and social interaction in the online process. In the online learning and teaching process, tutors saw themselves as facilitators. In fact, they could not differentiate between online tutoring and traditional teaching.

In this respect, students were not active and collaborative within the courses. However they were able to take responsibility for their own learning. On the other hand, it was only the assignments and final projects that seemed to help students reflect on their learning. The skills development of the students within the courses was also not considered, and problem solving and experiential learning could not be seen within the

structure and the practice of the courses. Although the assignments and the projects showed evidence of the process of learning, the grading system confirmed that the assessment was driven by product not process.

The documentary analysis thus confirmed the findings of the interviews that the tutors prepared and designed their online courses without considering the principles of constructivist approach. My own observations also backed up the necessity for further training about the constructivist approach and its principles for online courses.

Table II summarises the picture that emerged:

Table II. Analysis of Constructivist Principles

Core Principles	Comments
1. Learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments.	Although tutors attempted to use diverse topics and resources, learning process is not consonant with authentic learning and real world experiences.
2. Learning should involve social negotiation and mediation.	Tutors try to use communication tools to provide social negotiation and mediation for student learning. However, technical problems limit use of communication tools.
3. Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner.	Tutors considered diverse content for the courses and included these in their course plans, emphasising objectives, aims and learning outcomes of the courses. However, skills development was not taken into account.
4. Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge.	The learner's prior knowledge, interrelation between content and the skills were not considered.
5. Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences.	The performance of the students was assessed on product not process.
6. Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware.	Students can take responsibility for their own learning regarding to nature of online courses.
7. Tutors serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors.	Although tutors see themselves as facilitators, they can not sufficiently differentiate the roles of online tutor and the instructor. In this respect, they attempted to transfer traditional teaching roles into the online teaching process.
8. Tutors should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.	Tutors have tried to propose diverse topics and contents for their courses. However they were not really aware why they were doing so.

Implementing the Constructivist Approach into Online Course Designs

Research in the literature underlines that a constructivist framework for online course design is critical to the success of online practices (Dillon, 2000; Gold, 2001; Ausburn, 2004; Gulati, 2004).

In this respect, providing training to extend knowledge of the constructivist approach and implementing its principles into online course design were the significant objectives of cycle 3 in my action research process. Therefore, I delivered training to online tutors and formed project teams to prepare and design online courses based on collaborative efforts and negotiation.

The trainings covered what the constructivist approach is, what the differences are between traditional and constructivist classrooms, how the constructivist approach is beneficial for students, how tutors implement the principles of the constructivist approach, how constructivist approach learning intervention operates, the practice of the constructivist approach and online education through concrete examples.

The feedback forms of the tutors provided me material for reflection and evaluation of the contributions of the training to creating awareness of how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach. The participants reflected that the training helped them internalize the new approach and gain confidence about implementing the approach in their courses.

Constructivist pedagogy is a significant element in the design of collaborative online courses and practice, and tutors reported that this training enabled them to transfer the knowledge about constructivist pedagogy into practice. One of the participants stated: "I feel better, more knowledgeable, motivated toward preparing my course based on this approach". Another underlined that the training provided new ideas on online pedagogy and at the same time promoted a healthy exchange of ideas. An additional

comment was that the "training enlightened me in terms of the process, intervention and the use of technology together". There were a number of other remarks of a similar nature:

> "It made me have a clear picture of the steps while designing online courses"
>
> "I am more self-aware in providing students an authentic and real world environment for their learning".
>
> "I have confidence to adapt the principles of constructivist approach to my course design".
>
> "I include elements of constructivist approach in my course which might have been overlooked without the help of the training".
>
> "The training provided good grounds to understand how to design online courses".

As a result of the trainings, the tutors had developed their awareness of how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach and practiced team work in designing their courses in collaboration with their colleagues.

My research diary provided significant further evidence that the participants were excited to know about the new approach and increasingly confident about integrating this approach into their course design. This confirmed that the training had been very productive in creating awareness on the constructivist approach and building confidence about its implementation.

After the training, there was an adaptation process for the tutors in order to implement constructivist approach into online course design based on collaboration and negotiation with their colleagues. During the adaptation process, I conducted focus group activities as they would provide me with the opportunity to be a proactive insider researcher should there be any problems in implementing the new approach.

In the focus group activity, seven tutors voluntarily discussed what they learned and how they implemented the new approach. In addition, they found the opportunity to

share and negotiate with their colleagues and find solutions together for existing problems as well as learn what others gained from the process.

Regarding the focus group findings, the tutors agreed that the training helped them internalize the process. However technical problems had hindered the implementation of the new approach. Research emphasises that constructivist pedagogy in collaborative online learning fosters the learning and skills of online students (Huang, 2002; McLoughlin and Luca, 2002; McLuckie and Topping, 2004). In relation to the initial impact of course design based on the constructivist approach for learning and skills development, tutors made a number of comments:

> "Constructivist approach based activities help students learn better and develop skills because it is a well planned learning process".
>
> "It is a system encouraging students to learn in a more structured yet independent manner".
>
> "Students become more active, because they become key characters".
>
> "Authentic learning and real world experience are established".
>
> "The course relies on a diversity of topics".
>
> "Students become more responsible and active".
>
> "Students gain reasoning and self-reflection skills".

Furthermore, tutors underlined that the action learning process had enormous effects on their professional growth. One of the participants stressed: "it supports my enthusiasm to make better practice". Another stated that action learning provided gain new experiences and open new horizons. One of them remarked that: "this opened my eyes as to how students become part of the learning process and this provided a new window to me in my professional endeavours". Finally, a participant underlined that action learning helped have more efficient online classes due to the contributions of others. In this respect, tutors agreed that collective efforts were the platform for

building success in implementing the constructivist approach into online course design for better learning and skills development of students.

My research diary again provides confirming evidence of the tutors' enthusiasm towards the constructivist approach. They had a firm belief that the new approach helped students learn better and develop a higher level of responsibility, reasoning, reflection and critical thinking skills. Without doubt, the action learning process based on collaboration and negotiation among colleagues increased collegial activity for learning together and sharing and transferring knowledge for better working practice.

Outcome of Implementing the Constructivist Approach into Online Course Design

Constructivist pedagogy is the critical element in collaborative online course designs to enhance the quality of learning and teaching online. Within this pedagogy, there are a set of eight design principles that can help figure out the success of implementing the constructivist approach (Duffy and Jonassen, 1992; Huang, 2002; Ausburn, 2004).

In this respect, in cycle 4, semi-structured interviews with tutors, semi-structured interviews with students and students' self-reports based on scaling provided in-depth data on evaluating the implementation of constructivist approach into course designs in relation to the eight core principles.

The findings revealed that tutors successfully implemented the constructivist approach into their online course designs and that students gained research, communication, presentation, reasoning, team work and reflection skills. In this respect, my participatory action research project resulted in improved practice in the development of online course design.

Semi-structured interviews with tutors served to evaluate the implementation of the constructivist approach into online course design. The constructivist pedagogy provided an authentic, collaborative learning atmosphere to develop a high level of

responsibility, reasoning, reflection, critical thinking skills, communication and team work skills of the online students.

Seven online tutors voluntarily participated in the semi-structured interviews: The "Writing on Global Issues" course tutor from the General Education Department, the "Gender and Development" course tutor from Economics Department, the "History of Cyprus" course tutor from the Architecture Department, the "Tourism Policy and Planning", "Marketing", "Human Resources Management" and "Finance" course tutors from the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management.

In relation to encouraging authentic learning and integrating content with real life experiences the tutor who teaches "Writing on Global Issues" stated that this course proposed authentic learning and real world experiences for students through various research projects. The tutor who teaches "History of Cyprus" mentioned that online learning based on constructivist approach encourages students to immediately search the internet and interrelate course content with their life. The tutor who teaches "Gender and Development" underlined that courses based on the constructivist approach very much encouraged authentic learning and real world experiences for better learning. Tutors who teach in School of Tourism and Hospitality Management agreed that the courses based on constructivist approach provided authentic learning and supported the integration of learning with real world experiences through course assignments, projects and communication among students.

Furthermore, the tutors agreed that their courses provided opportunities for their students to engage in social negotiation and mediation through group discussion, group work and collaboration. Again though, the tutors underlined in this respect that technical problems in the system hindered efficient social interaction.

The tutors emphasised that constructivist based courses with a structured and planned nature encouraged students to be self-regulatory and self-aware of their learning, thus increasing levels of responsibility in their learning process. One of the tutors stressed: "definitely, students are independent, therefore, self-management was a key element". In addition, one of the tutors stated: "students were now more aware of their learning process by keeping a learning diary and portfolio of key learning events in the course design". In this respect, implementing constructivist approach into online course designs helped students find and follow a learning map and truly take responsibility for their own learning process.

Tutors agreed that they became facilitators - or 'constructivist teachers' in the online learning and teaching process. One of the tutors defined the tutor role as 'sage' to guide learners towards a better learning process. Another tutor stressed: "I used less time and gave more time to students. I was a regulator rather than delivering lectures".

In relation to the constructivist based course design, which was needed to encourage students to have multiple perspectives, the tutors agreed that assignments, research project, studying diverse topics within the course, discussions and negotiation of those topics with others through communication tools helped students have multiple perspectives.

One of the tutors stated: "sure, as course materials were numerous, they could learn from diverse topics". One of the tutors stressed: "studying diverse topics in course, discussions with peers through email, chat are critical elements to have multiple perspectives". In addition, tutors agreed that discussions with peers within group works, and negotiation on diverse topics with others helped students develop their communication and reflection and reasoning skills. Tutors also mentioned that

research projects and group assignments helped students develop communication, research and team work skills.

One of the tutors explained how students had to write critical evaluations on each course activity and how this enhanced the development of critical thinking and reflection skills. Significantly, tutors now mentioned that they had attempted to assess students' performance as a process using such activities such as portfolios, learning diaries, assignments and research projects.

Although tutors believe that constructivist based courses enable students to develop research, team work, communication, reflection and reasoning skills, they also argued that the pedagogy had limits regarding ethical understanding, and the skills of analysis and synthesis.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen volunteer online students from different seven online courses in order to investigate the changes on teaching philosophy of tutors and examine skills development of the online students. The semi-structured interview findings showed that students were satisfied with the learning activities and developed self-management, reflection, communication, team work, reasoning and research skills.

The students agreed that course design elements such as pictures, schedule of learning activities, communication tools, announcements, and the guidance of tutors motivated them learn to better. Significantly, they agreed that online courses require a high level of responsibility for their own learning process.

The students were highly satisfied with the online learning experience and reflected this through their perceptions on defining online learning and comparing online and traditional learning processes:

> "Online learning developed our self-responsibility"

"Online learning is new for me"

"Online learning helps me learn easily"

"Online learning provides better research skills"

"Online learning is perfect"

"Online learning is beneficial for us to learn how to make decisions"

"Traditional learning is done faster but online learning is a process"

"Traditional learning is about memorizing"

"Traditional learning gives stress and blocks my learning"

The students agreed that the course design motivated them. Different learning activities such as research, group work, pictures and the guidance of the tutor all encouraged better learning.

Further to this, online students found a link between course content and real life experiences during the course through group work, discussion, negotiation and research. Students described their responsibilities in the online learning process as following announcements, quizzes, assignments, conducting research, completing projects based on group work, self-management and time planning.

The students defined tutor responsibility as guiding their learning, motivating, and allowing group work and discussion. Moreover, online students reflected that online courses provided diverse topics for assignments and research projects which helped them develop multiple perspectives, enhance research, reasoning and reflection skills. Furthermore, they emphasized that their online courses helped them develop communication and technical skills through communication tools such as chat and email. They also mentioned that stated that the courses fostered management and planning, reasoning, reflection, and teamwork skills through research projects, and

group assignments based on group work. They noted that exams, projects, quizzes, and assignments were used as assessment tools in the online learning process.

In line with the semi-structured interviews, self-reports based on scaling were employed in order to investigate the skills development of online students. In this scaling activity, online students reflected on the role of course design in developing skills categorized as management of self (personal effectiveness), management of others (team work), management of information (communication skill), and management of task (research management).

In this respect, online students reported that the course helped them develop skills of taking responsibility for their own learning, developing and adopting new learning strategies, showing intellectual flexibility, using learning in new or different situations, reflecting on their own learning, clarifying criticism constructively, managing time, and coping with stress regarding to management of self (personal effectiveness).

Furthermore, the students reported that their online courses supported carrying out agreed tasks, working productively in a cooperative context, negotiating, learning in a collaborative context and supporting others in learning regarding to management of others (team work).

The students also underlined that the courses helped them develop skills in using appropriate sources of information, appropriate technology, using information critically, handling large amounts of information, and presenting information competently (communication skills).

In addition, the students stressed that they gained the ability to conceptualize ideas, set and maintain priorities, and plan and implement courses of action regarding the management of tasks (research management).

In addition to the semi-structured interviews with tutors and students, my research diary also confirmed that tutors' collective efforts had led to the development of online courses through the integration of the constructivist approach. This had resulted in developing communication skills, a high level of responsibility, research, critical thinking, team work, presentation and reflection skills on the part of the students. Table III summarises the principles of the constructivist approach and the outcome of the process:

Table III. Principles of Constructivist Approach: Learning Activities and Skills

Principles of Constructivist Approach	Learning Activities and Developed Skills
Learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments	Diverse course and research topics, group work and discussions helped students develop communication, research, reflection and team work skills.
Learning should involve social negotiation and mediation	Negotiation and discussions through communication tools such as chat, emails helped students involve in social negotiation. Although courses provided such an opportunity, technical problems hindered the development of communication skills.
Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner	Group work, discussion, assignment and projects, learning activities such as developing portfolios helped students develop reasoning, reflection, communication and team work skills.
Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge	
Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences	Students' performance was assessed in relation to learning process not product. Tutors attempted to assess students based on research projects, group works, assignments, active participation and exams.
Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware	Course plans and a schedule of learning activities guided students to become self-regulatory. In this respect, students learned self-management and showed a high level of responsibility in their learning.
Tutors serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning	Tutors are the facilitators to guide students to learn better.
Tutors should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content	Studying diverse topics, conducting research projects and assignments, negotiation with others supported students develop multiple perspectives and reflection skills.

Evaluation of the Efficiency of My Research Project

It is important to consider how this project impacted on professional knowledge and organisational performance in terms of its sustainability and efficiency for better working practice, as well as in terms of the professional growth of the participants.

I therefore prepared a feedback form for evaluation of the efficiency of my research and distributed it to the core research participants. The findings revealed that the research participants were satisfied with the research process which they saw as a valuable opportunity to internalize how to prepare and design online courses based on constructivist approach through team work for better working practice. In relation to feedback form questions about the evaluation of the efficiency of the research project, participants agreed that they were satisfied to have been involved in my work based research project.

In the following section, I reflect on the reports of the participants on the beneficial outcomes of the research for institutional development, and the contributions of the action research process to professional knowledge and experience, as well as the benefits of the constructivist approach for students and the tutors.

Beneficial Outcomes of the Research

In terms of institutional development, the participants reported that they were satisfied to have been part of the collaborative research for change and development within working practice. One of the participants stated: “a team work culture was established and meetings and negotiation provided knowledge sharing for institutional development”.

The participants reported that their collaborative efforts promoted team work, committed decision making through the project teams, the establishment of negotiation and sharing, and the transfer of professional knowledge among core members for better working practice. The participants reported that they internalized how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach and hence enhanced the program and online course development.

Benefits of Constructivist Approach

The constructivist approach provides particular benefits to online students. The research participants reported in particular that the approach helped prepare and design online courses for deep learning and enhanced the transferable skills of the students. The tutors stated that the approach helped them deliver better courses thus motivating students to learn better and develop target skills.

The tutors also reported that the students gained in-depth understanding and knowledge from the course and developed communication, research, responsibility, critical thinking and team work skills. One of the participants stated that "the constructivist approach helped shift students from memorization to grasping, and consolidating information for deep learning".

Further to this, one of the participants stated that: "group discussion, research projects, and group work provided students with multiple perspectives and in-depth knowledge which they can use to transfer knowledge and experience to real life and future learning. This showed the significant benefits of this approach".

Participants also reported that the constructivist approach helped motivate both students and tutors and reflected that the approach developed ways of looking at the teaching-learning process from different angles.

Contributions of the Action Research Process to Professional Knowledge and Experience

Action research is an innovative, interagency, reflective practice of working together for change, and it is worth reflecting on how the process contributed to the professional knowledge and experience of the research participants. The participants reported that the action research process had a positive impact on professional development, providing collaborative learning and negotiation for change within the

Institute and contributing to the internalization of theoretical and practical knowledge for better course design.

5.3 Conclusion

In summary, my participatory action research promoted “team work culture for better working practice” and “principles of constructivist approach in online course design to foster learning and skills of online students” The research project highlighted the literature gap on implementing the constructivist approach into online course designs through team work and hence may serve as a model of practice for other higher education institutions, in particular with respect to developing team work cultures to underpin sustainable institutional change. The project also provided considerable personal and professional enrichment to both myself, as the insider researcher, and the core participants in the research process.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter in my project outlines the conclusions and recommendations deriving from my work based project. It explores my model for the change and development in online practices through participatory action research, and seeks to underline some analytical generalizations that emerge from the research outcomes. The chapter concludes by exploring major implications, implications for practice and avenues for further research.

6.2 Discussion on Research Outcomes

My work based research project aimed to investigate the implementation of the constructivist approach into online course design in the Distance Education Institute at EMU. In the project, I employed participatory action research to propose change and development to institutional practice. My project incorporated creating an awareness of collaboration, team work in decision making processes for online course design and implementing the constructivist approach into online course design to develop the learning and transferable skills of online students. In terms of these broader aims, my research project included particular research objectives such as: creating an awareness in Distance Education Institute members about team work for decision making, creating awareness about the constructivist approach in online education, integrating the constructivist approach into online course design, and contributing to organizational change in terms of the course design within online education practices. I put all my efforts and expertise into the participatory action research approach

through a series of deliberate actions intended to achieve the best possible practice for change and development in my work context.

With respect to globalisation and technological developments in the academic world, and the accompanying rapid diffusion of knowledge, online education practice can provide a significant competitive advantage (McPherson and Nunes, 2006). Therefore, many higher education institutions have incorporated online education in their plans for quality improvement in a competitive world.

Regarding EUA standards and higher education policies for quality through change and development on online practices, distance education institutes have become highly strategic units which need to consider both pedagogical and organisational change and development through collaborative projects.

While implementing change and development in any specific program or course, considering team work and collaboration is essential (Duffuaa *et al.,* 2003). This requires committed decision-making and collaboration for innovation and change through project teams acting for better practice in the work setting (Houston, 2008). Research suggests that involvement of teachers and practitioners in an action learning process for program development results in better working practice (Passfield, 2002; Ho, 2006). My work based research project confirmed this research.

In my research process, in-depth interviews showed a lack of awareness among the members regarding collaborative decision making on course design and program development. In this respect, the training I conducted increased awareness of the necessity for project teams and the need for team work culture to improve working practice.

Course design is a critical success factor in online practice with regard to promoting learning and skills development of students (Laurillard, 2002; Mason, 2002; Oliver,

2002; Salmon, 2002). There is general agreement that online course design needs to promote a participative, authentic, student-centred learning atmosphere to promote better learning and skills development (Ehrmann, 2002; Hall, 2002; Laurillard, 2002; Mason, 2002; Oliver, 2002; Salmon, 2002). In this respect, the constructivist approach offers a collaborative framework of exceptional potential for supporting learners (Merrill, 1992; Dillon, 2000; Gold, 2001; Savery and Duffy, 2001; Ausburn, 2004). Indeed, constructivist pedagogy is the critical element in collaborative online course design in terms of its success in improving the quality of learning and teaching online (Salmon, 2002; Osborn and Theodore, 2005).

Within this pedagogical framework, there is a set of eight design principles, which are: learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments; learning should involve social negotiation and mediation; content and skills should be made relevant to the learner; content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge; students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences; students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware; tutors serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors; tutors should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.

Social constructivism, which views all knowledge as socially constructed through interactions with other individuals and the environment and maintains an emphasis on language use, provides profound insights on how to prepare and design online courses for deep learning and the skills development of the students. In a collaborative, constructivist learning environment, such as in my own work based project, students have the chance to develop higher order thinking, reflection, communication, research, team work skills through managing their own learning within a learning community.

This helps them to be critical learners in the lifelong learning process (Curtis and Lawson, 2001; Huang, 2002; McLoughlin and Luca, 2002; Harris and Bretag, 2003; McLuckie and Topping, 2004). Meanwhile, Edwards (2001), Hughes, Daykin (2002), Morrison (2003), Wilhelm (2003), Fisher and Baird (2005), and Neo (2005) provide insights into the impact of designing constructivist online learning courses to enhance the learning and skills development of students. In my own project, I specifically explored how the constructivist approach in online course design promotes learning and develops communication, research, reflection, critical thinking and presentation skills through the collaborative efforts of tutors. The success of my practical work derived from a series of actions within a participatory action research cycle.. The base-line measurement through semi-structured interviews with the tutors, and documentary analysis of course design showed that the tutors had limited preliminary knowledge and experience of the constructivist approach and led to training of tutors in order to extend their knowledge of how to prepare and design online courses based on constructivist principles.

The tutors implemented the approach through negotiation and discussion with their project teams. Semi-structured interviews with tutors, and semi-structured interviews and self-reports of the students revealed that implementing constructivist approach into online course designs does indeed enhance learning and develop the skills of students as well as promote better working practice. My research project revealed the following conclusions:

- ✓ Team work culture: Team work and collaboration was practiced within the research process as the critical success factor for innovation and change. Project teams were developed to propose change on course design and implement the constructivist approach to promote the learning and skills

development of the students. In this respect, the tutors gained pedagogical insights into course design and developed their professional learning through collaboration. In addition, a team work culture was established that enabled the Institute to act together for the quality mission.

- ✓ The role of course design: Course design based on the constructivist approach in my practical work demonstrated that collaborative work, research activities, communication and negotiation, and the integration of learning with real life experiences within courses are the necessary elements for deep, active learning and skills development.
- ✓ Learning and skills: Course design based on the constructivist approach facilitated in-depth knowledge and experience of course subject matter. It also enhanced deep and active learning and resulting in developing self-responsibility, higher order thinking, critical analytical thinking, research, communication, reflection, collaboration and presentation skills on the part of students.

My work based research project was grounded on participatory action research. It comprised an action research cycle in which tutors as professionals acted collaboratively to propose change and development for better working practice. In this respect, I designed a series of actions to reach the research outcomes and bring about change and development in online course design.

6.3 Some Analytical Generalizations

Regarding the participatory action research and the conclusions of my research project, some analytical generalizations can be listed as following:

- Participatory action research can lead to change and development in practice through collaborative efforts of professionals.

- Distance education institutes are strategic units in higher education institutions that should be used to drive quality improvements in the competitive market.
- Innovation and change for quality in education can be realised through deliberate action plans in which professionals work together to drive improvement.
- Institutes should develop a team work culture, develop policies and procedures within the institute based on collaboration, and provide or facilitate involvement in training on pedagogical and technical developments.
- In planning ongoing quality assurance, tutors need to create standards, encourage students feedback, assess performance through questionnaire, interviews, etc., act as a mentor or peer, and keep a journal of teaching experience.
- Online delivery is affected by student characteristics, technology, tutors and the course design.
- Course design needs to be curriculum sensitive and it needs to be learner focused, accessible, relevant, collaborative and interactive. It needs to be based on small group size since it relies on cohesion and the need to address learning styles and cultures.
- The constructivist approach in online course design is the most appropriate approach to promote learning and skills development in students.
- The principles of the constructivist approach need to be realized through course objectives, course activities and learning outcomes. Tutors need to be aware that learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments, and should involve social negotiation and mediation. Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner, and should be understood within the framework of

the learner's prior knowledge. Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences. Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware. Tutors serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors. Tutors should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.

- In the constructivist learning environment, group activity and collaboration increases social interaction and thus enhances learning.
- Course content, learning activities and interaction in online courses increase the self-reflective skills of students.
- The constructivist learning experience increases problem based learning when tutors provide the chance for learners to develop multiple perspectives.
- The constructivist learning environment helps students to develop self-responsibility and research, reflection and critical thinking skills.
- Group learning activities provide have a positive impact on learning and team work skills.
- Collaborative learning facilitates peer engagement, which increases communication and reflection skills.
- The online context can lead to an increase in learner responsibility.
- Students develop positive attitudes in constructivist learning environments, different to those they develop from their traditional classroom experiences.
- Course design elements including personalization, variety, self-direction, and development of a learning community positively effect students learning.
- Communication tools such as chat, discussion boards, email increase collaboration.

- Communication, problem solving, team building and reflective thinking are amongst the skills developed in the constructivist online learning context.

6.4 Major Implications

My research investigated the role of online course design based on the constructivist approach in enhancing the learning and skills of the online students. It concluded that employing a constructivist approach in online course design is one of the critical success factors in developing quality in online practices.

My work based research project proposed innovation and change through the collaborative efforts of professionals in participatory action research. It resulted in better team work within the institute regarding commitment and decision-making by members and proved to be a model that could be shared with other higher education institutions to change and develop their own performance in online course design for quality improvement. In addition, my research filled the gap on the literature regarding implementing the constructivist approach into online courses in order to develop the learning and skills of online students. It further opens an academic debate about the value of work based projects through participatory action research in bringing about change and development for quality improvements within higher education institutions.

Implications for Practice

- My work based research project revealed that participatory action research contributes change and development within working practice.
- My work based research project provided participants with a deeper understanding of the pedagogical and organizational aspects of online education.

- The collaborative research process provided participants with an awareness of the importance of team work culture in working practice.
- The participants gained in-depth insights into the principles of the constructivist approach in online course design.
- Institute members extended their knowledge and experience on how to prepare and design online courses based on the constructivist approach.
- Research participants' involvement in action learning within a participatory action research process enhanced professional growth.
- The collaborative efforts of the research participants and myself promoted personal and professional development in our academic careers.

Implications for Further Research

- For further studies, comparative case studies could be used to examine the performances of different institutes in different higher education institutions in implementing the constructivist approach in online courses.
- In addition, each principle of the constructivist approach within online course design could be a distinct research focus and the subject of in-depth investigation.
- Further research could incorporate a mixed approach to integrate qualitative and quantitative research design to increase the validity and reliability of the research.

CHAPTER VII

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON RESEARCH JOURNEY

7.1 Introduction

This document includes a critical commentary on my project and its impact on professional knowledge and practice. My research project aimed at change and development in online education practice within the Distance Education Institute at EMU based on European University Association norms. It contributed to the professional development of online tutors in designing online courses based on the constructivist approach in order to develop the generic skills of online students.

My research project and action research cycle provided in-depth knowledge and experience to me and the participants regarding change and development in working practice. As a result of my participatory action research, the collaborative efforts of volunteer participants and myself contributed change and development in creating a team work culture within the organization and developing the generic skills of students. Evidence of the impact and success of my project include my participation in international conferences, my published paper in the Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, a submitted abstract to an international conference about online communication and social networking, official letters from the Distance Education Institute and the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management noting the impact of project, becoming a member of new research projects, the production of a handbook on how to design online courses based on team work culture that was submitted to the Higher Education Councils in Turkey and North Cyprus, presenting my research project to the public, media and professionals in the Management Centre, and submitting a paper on work-based learning experiences to the Eurasian Journal of Educational Research.

7.2 Reflections on Research Focus and Method

EMU has started to work on quality improvements with online education as a major strategic tool. The EUA report revealed the necessity for change and development in online practice, one implication being that online practice could be considered a strategic tool for expanding the capacity of the services.

In addition to this, the literature gap suggested the practical necessity of studying the implementation of the constructivist approach into online courses for developing the generic skills of online students. As I had in-depth knowledge and experience in the field of online education and the work context was favourable, I was in a good position to carry out a work based project in this field.

Thus the EUA report, my role as dedicated worker researcher and the literature gap on online education practice justified all justified the choice and design of such a project within the Doctorate of Professional Studies Programme.

Regarding the focus of the project, the following objectives were outlined, to be achieved through participatory action research. The objectives also show the significance of the project and its expected impacts and outcomes.

- To create the awareness in Distance Education Institute members on team work for decision making regarding course design
- To create awareness of the constructivist approach in online education through training
- To integrate the constructivist approach into online course design for developing the critical thinking skills of online students
- To contribute to organizational change in terms of instructional design within distance education practice

Regarding the nature of the project's objectives, a qualitative research design was chosen in which socially constructed meanings, experiences and perceptions of the research participants would lead to practical realizations of the objectives through an inductive process.

Participatory action research was employed in my research to find contextual solutions for better working practice through the collaborative efforts of professionals. Using this approach developed my professional knowledge and experience and the online tutors, who were the core members of the research team.

The action research cycle was implemented in a strategic and logical fashion. The training and other strategic actions showed that participatory action research suited my research exactly, providing great insights for online tutors to improve the design of online courses. The core members participated voluntarily in the action research cycle and I sensitively considered the issue of ethics, preparing a research package, allocating the right time and place for interviews, focus groups and training and getting permission and mutual agreement through consent forms. Establishing warm contacts and trust with stakeholders were critical success factors in this work based research project.

In addition to this, I paid great attention to maintaining communication with participants, making them voluntarily part of the project, and informing them about the research process. In this respect, the research package was considered part of the ethical implementation and covered in-depth information about the aim, significance of the project, my role as worker researcher, a research report and the action research process in order to stress the sensitivity of the worker researcher to the project.

Incentives also motivated the participants. USBs, pencils and folder bags were distributed in focus group and training sessions. The project had the financial support

of the Ministry of Education and this required me to allocate resources efficiently and properly. Expenditure also included the preparation of handbooks, and the organizing of training.

My project was constituted as an action plan for the Distance Education Institute to produce a sustainable system for preparing and designing online courses through the constructivist approach. In this respect, the participatory action research incorporated a series of actions to achieve the objectives of the research project. These actions included in-depth interviews, trainings, semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, focus group and self-reports as multiple data collection techniques. Data triangulation enhanced the validity and reliability of the research results.

Each action in the strategic implementation of the project was carefully planned in order to realize efficient outcomes regarding my research aims and objectives.

Action I: In-depth Interviews with institute members
Focus: Exploring team work in the institute for collaborative decision making process in relation to course design.

Action II: Training to institute members
Focus: Team work and decision making processes for course design

Action III: Semi-structured Interviews with online tutors
Focus: Evaluating the awareness of online tutors about the constructivist approach

Action IV: Documents
Focus: Analyzing the course designs of online courses based on the criteria of the constructivist approach

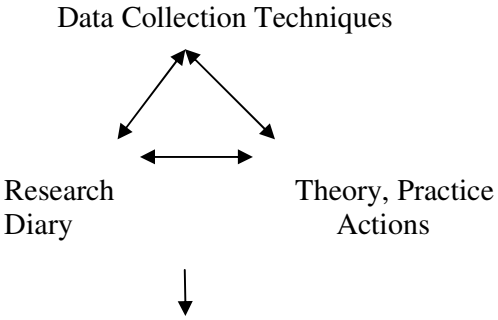
Action V: Training to online tutors
Focus: Creating awareness of constructivist approach based course design

Action VI: Focus groups with tutors
Focus: Integration and adaptation process to new approach

Action VII: Semi-structured Interviews with online tutors
Focus: Investigating the changes to teaching philosophy of tutors and examining the skills development of online students

Action VIII: Semi-structured Interviews and Self-reports of Students
Focus: Investigating the role of constructivist approach based course design in developing skills

Action IX: Evaluating the efficiency of the project and triangulating data



Action X: Project Report as handbook

Through these actions, a lot of positive contributions were made to reaching successful outcomes of the project. After implementation, the impacts were observed and evaluated within a semester in which a handbook for practice was also distributed and the reflections of the tutors gathered through feedback forms.

In these ways, the success of the project was revealed. The participatory action research project very firmly provided change and development in how to design online courses based on the constructivist approach and a team work culture.

In this research journey, I have a firm belief that I showed a high level of responsibility in managing the project and engaging the collaboration of the research participants, consultants and adviser. “Being strategic” was a key tool at every step of the process for me.

7.3 Professional Knowledge and Practice

As my educational background and experiences were related to education and communication, my project motivated me to improve the level of professionalism in the field of online education. I also recognized that focusing on theoretical work was not sufficient in higher education practice, and that my project had to lead to practical

results for me and my colleagues. In this respect, the aim was to see a Distance Education Institute functioning as a coherent team in which collaboration, knowledge exchange and transfer were the foundations of better working practice.

In this respect, the chosen research approach and cycle were highly appropriate. Both the core members and myself internalized the action research cycle and learned how to change and develop working practices through collaborative efforts. By the end of the research project, the following outcomes had been achieved and reflect a harmonic picture of our collaborative, professional efforts.

- ✓ Team work culture: Team work and collaboration were practiced within the research process and were the critical success factor in the innovation and change. The project teams functioned properly to propose change to course design and implemented the constructivist approach to promote student learning and skills development. Through this process, the tutors gained pedagogical insights into course design and developed their professional learning through collaboration. In addition, a team work culture was established that helped the Institute to act together in terms of its quality mission.
- ✓ The role of course design: Course design based on the constructivist approach in the practical work demonstrated that collaborative work and research activities, communication and negotiation, and integration of learning and experiences with real life experiences within the courses are the essential elements for deep, active learning and skills development.
- ✓ Learning and skills: Course design based on the constructivist approach provided in-depth knowledge of subject matter. It also enhanced deeper and more active learning and this resulted in developing student self-responsibility,

higher order thinking, critical analytical thinking, and research, communication and presentation skills.

Living in a small community and having a centralized education system as a cultural element of this society tends to lead people to think in structured, fixed ways, but hesitate to innovate and show flexibility. In this respect, it is not easy for people to embark on a change process and collaborate with others in that process. Simply, the society is not very open to experiencing new learning and teaching processes. This meant that the online education project was in fact a very challenging one. As a senior instructor in Educational Sciences Department, I attempted to use alternative learning and teaching methods to diffuse de-centralized education, and stress the importance of collaboration in learning, the importance of intellectual flexibility and adaptation skills for future experiences.

The project was the culmination of a great deal of effort, including a masters degree and ten years experience of diffusing the importance of online education through academic papers, conferences, association membership and work within the Distance Education Institute. It is to be hoped that this Doctorate of Professional Studies project is a reflection of how I managed the challenges as worker researcher and how I helped others transform their ways of understanding for innovation and change in better working performance.

As stated, the project aimed to implement the constructivist approach into online courses through a team work culture. It proposed innovation, change and development in working practice. The literature review and the EUA report confirmed the significance the project and its objectives.

The research itself comprised a series of deliberately planned and implemented strategic steps, commencing with persuading participants to be part of the research and

allocating project resources. Trust, communication, management skills and showing evidence of expertise were important in terms of gaining the confidence and enthusiastic participation of prospective participants. A research package that included aim, objectives, consent form, and details of the action process action research process was an essential tool in this regard.

Because of the economic problems of this small community, it is difficult to find sponsors and financial support for research projects. I applied for funding to the University and the Ministry of Education. This was a long, slow and difficult process, which had to be very carefully and strategically prepared and managed in order to arrive at a positive result. In short, two major challenges had to be faced at the outset, one of which was motivating participation and the other of which was acquiring resources. This in itself greatly contributed to my management, research, leadership and communication skills.

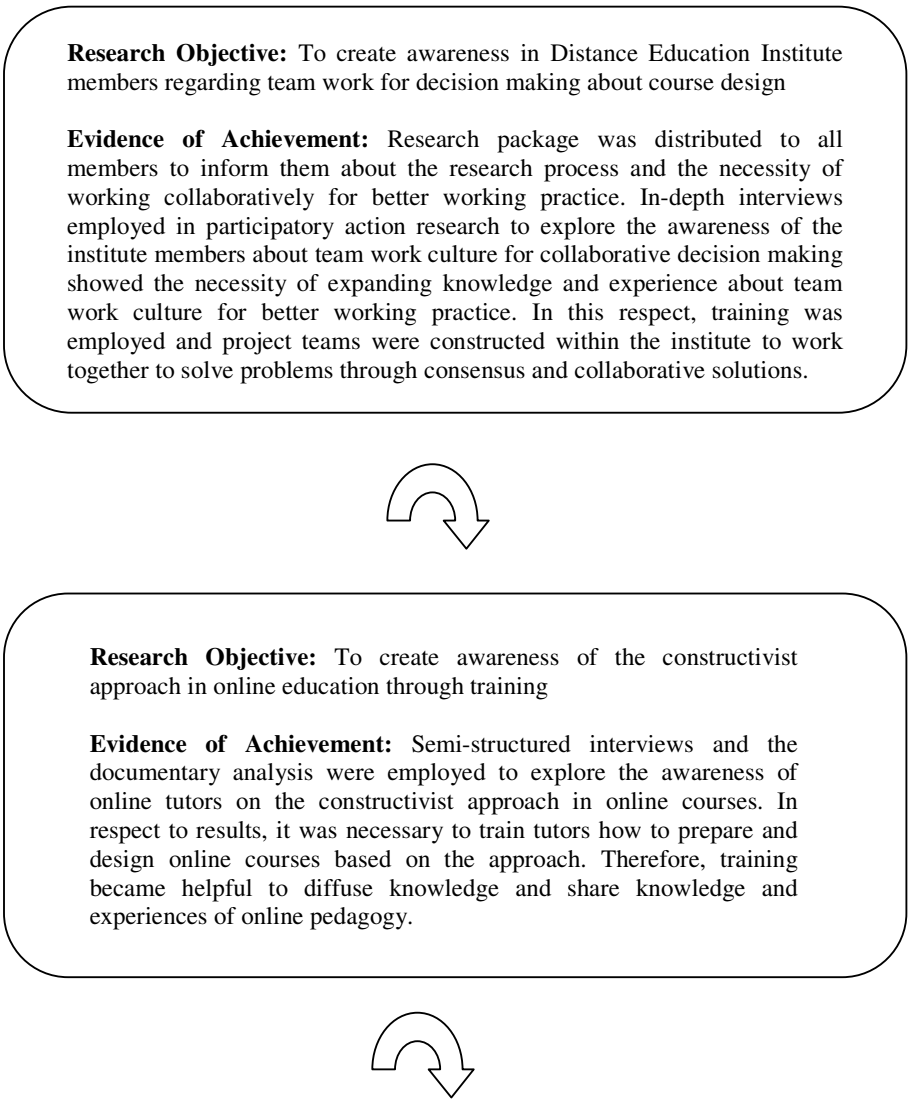
In the research itself, I generated a large amount of data through various data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, feedback forms from training, semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, self-reports, researcher diary and feedback forms of evaluation on the efficiency of the project as a whole. I managed the large amounts of data through triangulation.

During the research process, I put great effort into the management and organization of each and every event. Finding appropriate times and places for participants to meet proved difficult because of their diverse workloads and schedules and is just one example of the many issues that had to be negotiated.

Some elements of the project were extremely new to the participants. For example, they had never experienced focus group activities before and it proved quite difficult to explain how the activities work. It is particularly pleasing therefore that the focus group

activity was the most constructive data collection technique employed in the research process.

At each stage in the research I had to be proactive, well planned and strategic. I had to manage my dual roles as worker and researcher and cope with a heavy load of teaching as well as responsibilities as an executive peer journal reviewer, and a pregnancy. The following figure summarize how I managed the research process in relation to the research objectives and what was achieved in the process:



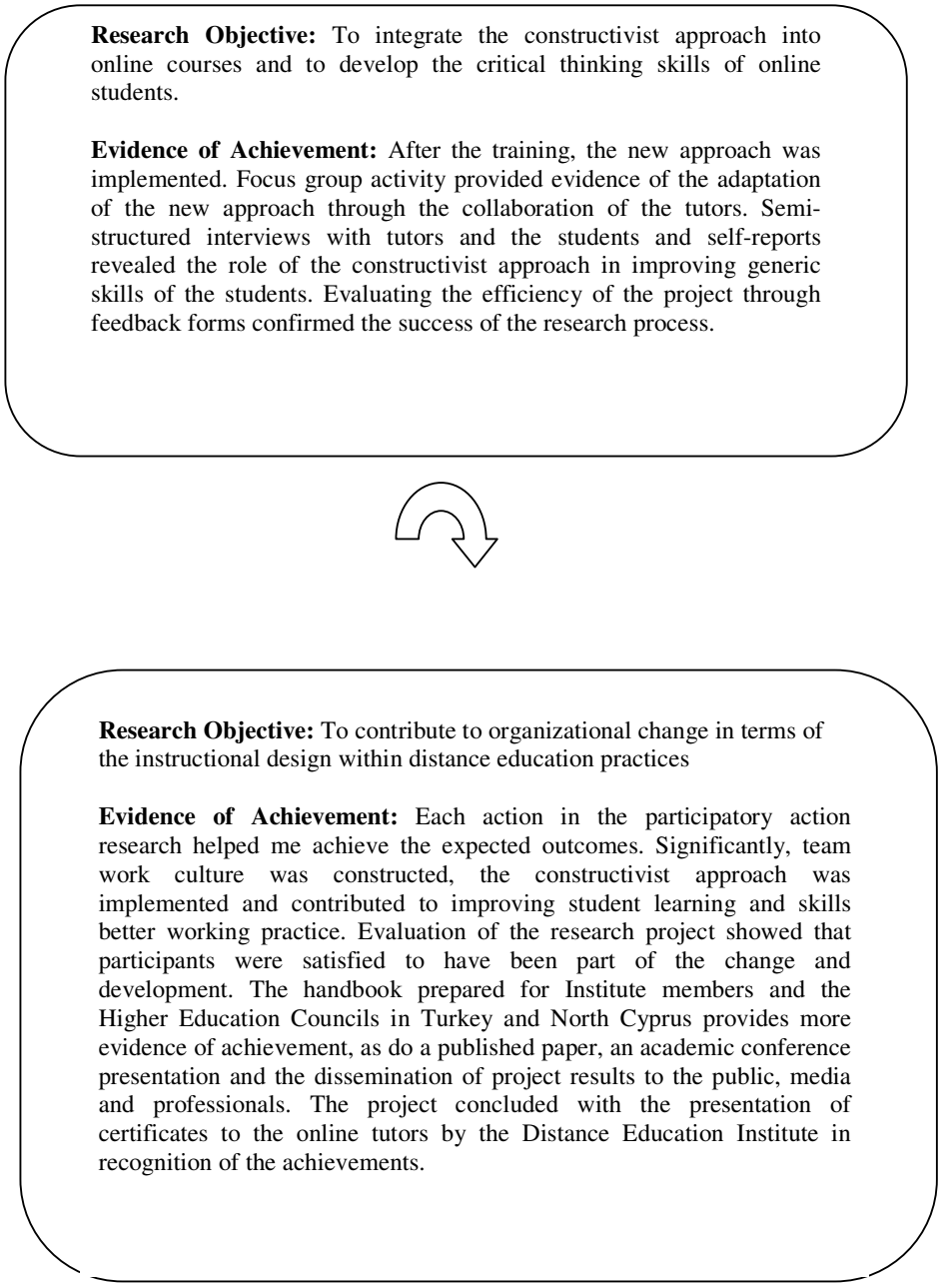


Figure 6. Research Objectives and Achievement.

This work based research project has had a great impact on my professional studies. I have started a consultancy for the purpose of opening an online education system in a new university, continue to present papers in international conferences and am publishing a research paper in educational technology field.

In addition, I have been involved in a new project as a responsible researcher about strategic planning and management, established negotiations with distance education professionals and become a member of ACCE Spaces of Interaction. These professional activities confirm the contributions of the research project and the value of studying for the Doctorate of Professional Studies.

Finally, it is important to restate the parameters of the research process:

- The research was conducted at the EMU Distance Education Institute in the 2008-2010 Academic Years.
- I had dual roles as worker and researcher which created a substantial workload during the research process.
- Participants had no prior knowledge and experience of online pedagogy.
- There were sixteen members and fourteen students involved in the research as volunteer participants.
- It was the first experience for me as a researcher and for the participants of participatory action research.
- In the participatory action research, in-depth interviews, training, semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, focus groups, self-reports and a research diary were used as multiple data collection techniques.

In relation to the achievements and the parameters of the participatory action research process, I considered ethics at each stage. I managed my own learning, allocated resources, diffused of research and professional knowledge and conducted critical analysis. In short the 'culture' of my project was characterised by a high level of responsibility. My dedication to change and development for better working practice and continuing professional development is a lifelong journey but one that will forever incorporate my experiences and learning in the Doctorate of Professional Studies.

References

Adams, S, M, 2007, 'From distance to online: a consortium approach', *On The Horizon,* 15, 3, pp 190-95.

Allan, J, & Lawless, N, 2003, 'Stress caused by on-line collaboration in e-learning: a developing model', *Education + Training*, 45, 8/9, pp 564-72.

Altinay, L, & Parakevas, A, 2008, *Planning research in hospitality and tourism*, Oxford: Elsevier.

Altrichter, H, Posch, P, & Somekh, B, 1993, *Teachers investigate their work*, London: Routledge.

Anderton, B, 2006, 'Using the online course to promote self-regulated learning strategies in pre-service teachers', *Journal of Interactive Online Teaching,* 5, **2**, pp 156-177.

Andrew, A, M, 2004, 'Questions about constructivism', *Kybernetes*, 33, 9/10, pp1392-95.

Armsby, P, 2000, *Methodologies of Work Based Learning*, SEDA Paper 109, The Staff and Educational Development Association, Birmingham.

Ausburn, L, J, 2004, 'Design components most valued by adult learners in blended online education environments: an American perspective', *Educational Media International,* 41, **4**, pp 327-37.

Badu, E, E, 2002, 'Team management and university libraries in Ghana: the influence of culture, *Library Management'*, 23, **6/7**, pp 287-93.

Beatty, R, Bedford, J, & et al, 2008, 'Recording action research in a classroom: singing with chickadees', *Educational Action Research,* 16, **3**, pp 335-45.

Bell, J, 2007, 'E-learning: your flexible development friend?', *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 21, **6**, pp 7-9.

Bennett, N, et al., 1999, Patterns of core and generic skill provision in higher education. *Higher Education*, **37**,1, pp 71-93.

Biggs, J, 1999, *Teaching for quality learning at university,* Buckingham: The Society for research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Bleimann, U, 2004, 'Atlantis University: a new pedagogical approach beyond e-learning', *Campus-Wide Information Systems,* 21, **5**, pp191-95.

Bravo, C, Redondo, M, A, Ortega, M, & Verdejo, M, F, 2006, 'Collaborative environments for the learning of design: a model and a case study in Domotics', *Computer & Education*, 46, pp 152-173.

Bokeno, M, 2008, 'Complexity: an alternative paradigm for teamwork development', *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 22, **6**, pp 7-10.

Bogdan, R, C, & Biklen, S, K, 1992, *Qualitative research for education,* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Brown, T, H, 2006, 'Beyond constructivism: navigationism in the knowledge era', *On The Horizon,* 14, **3**, pp108-120.

Bryman, A, 2004, *Social research methods,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bustingorry, S, O, 2008, 'Towards teachers' professional autonomy through action research', *Educational Action Research*, 16, **3**, pp 407-21.

Castka, P, Bamber, C, J, & Sharp, J, M, 2003, 'Measuring teamwork culture: the use of a modified EFQM model', *Journal of Management Development*, 22, **2**, pp 149-170.

Castka, P, Sharp, M, J, & Bamber, C, J, 2003, 'Assessing team development to improve organizational performance', *Measuring Business Excellence*, 7, **4**, pp 29-36.

Cavaleri, S, & Reed, F, 2008, 'Leading dynamically complex projects', *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business,* 1, **1**, pp 71-87.

Clark, R, C, & Mayer, R, E, 2003, *E-learning and the science of instruction,* San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Chang, K, E, Sung, Y, T, & Lee, C, L, 2003, 'Web-based collaborative inquiry learning', *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning,* 19, pp 56-69.

Chii, A, Chiang, C, Pak, I, & Fung, W, 2004, 'Redesigning chat forum for critical thinking in a problem-based learning environment', *Internet and Higher Education,* 7, pp 311-28.

Crow, J, & Smith, L, 2003, 'Using co-Teaching as a means of facilitating interprofessional collaboration in health and social care', *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 17, **1**, pp 45-55.

Cohen, L, Manion, L, & Morrison, K, 2000, *Research methods in education,* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Combe, C, 2005, 'Developing and implementing an online doctoral programme', *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19, **2**, pp 118-27.

Cook, T, 2004, 'Reflecting and learning together: action research as a vital element of developing understanding and practice', *Educational Action Research*, 12, **1**, pp 77-99.

Cooperstein, S, E, & Weidinger, E, K, 2004, 'Beyond active learning: a constructivist approach to learning', *Reference Services Review*, 32, **2**, pp 141-48.

Cotton, T, & Griffiths, M, 2007, 'Action research, stories and practical philosophy', *Educational Action Research*, 15, **4**, pp 545-61.

Creswell, J, W, 1994, *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches*, United Kingdom: SAGE.

Curtis, D, D, & Lawson, M, J, 2001, 'Exploring collaborative online learning', *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 5, **1**, pp 21-34.

Denzin, N, K, & Lincoln, Y, S, 2003, *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*, London:SAGE.

Denton, D, K, 2006, 'Making changes within a team', *Team Performance Management*, 12, **3/4**, pp 82-90.

Dillon, A, 2000, 'Designing a better learning environment with the web: problems and prospects', *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 3, **1** , pp 97-102.

Doolittle, P, 1997, 'Vygotsky's zone of proximal development as a theoretical foundation for cooperative learning', *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching,* 8, **1**, pp 83-103.

Driver, M, 2003, 'Improving group learning through electronically facilitated skillful discussions', *Learning Organization*, 10, **5**, pp 283-93.

Duffy, T, M, & Jonassen, D, H, 1991, 'Constructivism: new implications for instruction technology', *Educational Technology*, pp 7-12.

Duffy, T, M, & Jonassen, D, 1992, *Constructivism and the technology of instruction:A conservation*. Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Duffy, T, M, & Cunningham, D, J, 1996, 'Constructivism: implications for the design and delivery of instruction, in Jonassen, D.H. (Ed.), *Handbook of research for educational communication & technology*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Duffuaa, S, O, Al-Turki, U, M, & Hawsawi, F, M, 2003, 'Quality function deployment for designing a basic statistics course', *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, 20, **6**, pp 740-50.

Dyer, W, 1977, *Team building: Issues and alternatives*, Reading: Addison-Wesley.

Edward, N, S, 2001, 'Evaluation of a constructivist approach to student induction in relation to students' learning styles', *EUR. J. ENG. ED*, 26, **4**, pp 429–40.

Ehrmann, S, C, 2002, '*Using Technology to Improve Outcomes of Higher Education:Learning from Past Mistakes',* Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford.

Eilertsen, T, V, Gustafson, N, & Salo, P, 2008, 'Action research and micropolitics in Schools', *Educational Action Research*, 16, **3**, pp 295-309.

Elbaum, B, Mclntyre, C, & Smith, A, 2002, *Essential elements: Prepare, design, and teach your online course*, Madison: Atwood publishing.

Ellis, R, A, Hughes, J, Weyers, M, & Riding, P, 2008, 'University teacher approaches to design and teaching and concepts of learning technologies', *Teaching and Teacher Education*.

Ennew, C, T, & Young, A, F, 2006, 'Weapons of mass instruction? The rhetoric and reality of online learning', *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 24, **2**, pp 148-57.

EMU. http://www.emu.edu.tr/mevzuat/Eng-Rules05/administration/str-plan.doc

EUA Report. (2007). http://www.emu.edu.tr/EUA-report.pdf.

Finger, S, Gelman, D, Fay, A, Szczerban, M, Smailagic, S, & Siewiorek, D, P, 2006, 'Supporting collaborative learning in engineering design', *International Journal of Expert Systems and Applications*.

Fisher, M, & Baird, D, E, 2005, ,Online learning design that fosters student support, self-regulation, and retention', *Campus-Wide Information Systems*, 22, **2**, pp 88-10.

Fraenkel, J, R, & Wallen, N, E, 2000, *How to design & evaluate research in Education*, Boston:McGraw-Hill.

Francis, D, & Young, D, 1979, *Improving work groups: A practical manual for team building*, California: San Diego University Associates.

Freebody, P, 2003, *Qualitative research in education: Interaction and practice*, London: SAGE.

Fogelman, K, "Surveys and Sampling" in Coleman, M. & Briggs, R. J. (2002) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*, London: Paul Chapman.

Fosnot, C, T, 1996, 'Constructivism: A psychological theory of learning' in C, T, Fosnot (ed) *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice,* New York: Teacher College Press.

Gilbert, S, D, 2001, *How to be a successful online student*, San Francisco: McGraw-Hill.

Gill, J, & Johnson, P, 1997, *Research methods for managers*, London:Paul Chapmann.

Gold, S, 2001, 'A constructivist approach to online training for online teachers', *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 15, **1** , pp 35-57.

Go´mez, P, Gonza´lez, M, J, Gil, F, Lupia´n˜ez, J, L, Moreno, M, F, Rico, L, & Romero, I. 2007, 'Assessing the relevance of higher education Courses', *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 30, pp 149–60.

Gonzalez, C, B, Hernandez, T, Kusch, J, & Ryan, C, 2004, 'Planning as action Research', *Educational Action Research,* 12, **1**, pp 59-77.

Gulati, S, 2004, *'Constructivism and Emerging Online Learning Pedagogy: A Discussion for Formal to Acknowledge and Promote the Informal',* Annual Conference of the Universities Association Continuing Education-Regional Futures: Formal and Informal Learning Perspectives, Centre for Life-long Learning, University of Glamorgan.

Gunasekaran, A, McNeil, R, D, & Shaul, D, 2002, 'E-learning: research and Applications', *Industrial and Commercial Training,* 34, **2**, pp 44-53.

Haartsen-Geven, M, & Sandberg, J, 2007, 'Developing constructivist learning environments: a management framework', *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*, 4, **3**, pp 147-160.

Hall, R, 2002, 'Aligning learning, teaching and assessment using the web: An evaluation of pedagogic approaches', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 33, **2**, pp 149-58.

Halton, M, J, 2004, 'Putting professional development into action by putting action into professional development in second level schools in Ireland?', *Educational Action Research*, 12, **1**, pp 127-45.

Hammersley, M, & Atkinson, P, 1983, *Ethnography: Principles in practice*, London: Tavistock.

Harris, H, & Bretag, T, 2003, 'Reflective and collaborative teaching practice: working towards quality student learning outcomes', *Quality in Higher Education*, 9, **2**, pp 179-85.

Hartman, J, Dziuban, C, & Moskal, P, 2007, 'Strategic initiatives in the online environment: opportunities and challenges', *On The Horizon*, 15, **3**, pp 157-68.

Ho, E, S, 2006, 'Educational decentralization in three Asian societies: Japan, Korea and Hong Kong', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44, **6**, pp 590-603.

Houston, D, 2008, 'Rethinking quality and improvement in higher education', *Quality Assurance in Education*, 16, **1**, pp 61-79.

Huang, H, M, 2002, 'Toward constructivism for adult learners in online learning Environments', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 33, **1**, pp 27-37.

Hubbard, R. S, & Power, B, M, 1993, *The art of classroom inquiry*, USA: Heinemann.

Hughes, M, & Daykin, N, 2002, 'Towards constructivism: Investigating students' perceptions and learning as a result of using an online environment', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 39, **3**, pp 217-24.

Huszczo, G, 1990, 'Training for team building', *Training and Development*, 44, **2**, pp 37-43.

Huszczo, G, 1990, 'Professional development for team building', *Professional Development and Development Journal*, pp 37-43.

Hutchins, H, M, & Hutchison, D, 2008, 'Cross-disciplinary contributions to e-learning design: a tripartite design model', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 20, **5**, pp 364-80.

Jeffery, A, B, Maes, J, D, & Bratton-Jeffery, M, F, 2005, 'Improving team decision-making performance with collaborative modelling', *Team Performance Management*, 11, **1/2**, pp 40-50.

Jonassen, D, H, 1991, 'Evaluating constructivist learning', in Duffy, T, M, & Jonassen, D, H, (eds) *Constructivism and the technology of education*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Jonassen, D, H, 1994, 'Thinking technology: towards a constructivist design model', *Educational Technology*, pp 34-7.

Jonassen, D, H, 1999, 'Designing constructivist learning environments, in Reigeluth, C,M, (ed) Instructional Theories and Models: A New Paradigm of Instructional Theory, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Johnson, D, & Johnson, F, 1991, *Joining together: Group theory and group skills*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Jung, I, Choi, S, Lim, C, & Leem, J, 2002, 'Effects of different types of instruction on learning achievement, satisfaction and participation in web-based instruction', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 39, **2**, pp153-62.

Kaya, Z, 2002, *Uzaktan egitim*, Ankara: Pegem Yayincilik.

Kim, K, J, Liu, S, & Bonk, C, J, 2005, 'Online MBA students' perceptions of online learning: Benefits, challenges, and suggestions', *Internet and Higher Education*, 8, pp 335-44.

Lanza, P, 1985, 'Team appraisals', *Personnel Journal*, 64, p 47.

Lam, Y, L, J, 2005, 'School organizational structures: effects on teacher and student learning', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43, **4**, pp 387-401.

Laurillard, D, 2002, *Rethinking university teaching: A conversational framework for the effective use of learning technology,* London:Routledge.

Ledwith, M, 2007, 'On being critical: uniting theory and practice through emancipatory action research', *Educational Action Research*, 15, **4**, pp 597-13.

Lefoe, G, 1998, 'Creating constructivist learning environments on the web: the challenge in higher education', *ASCILITE*, pp 453-64.

Leinonen, P, & Bluemink, J, 2008, 'The distributed team members' explanations of knowledge they assume to be shared', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 20, **1**, pp 38-53.

Lemmergaard, J, 2008, 'Roles in the ISD process: a collaborative approach', *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 21, **5**, pp 543-56.

LoBue, R, 2002, 'Team self-assessment: problem solving for small workgroups', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 14, **7**, pp 286-97.

Lomax, P, McNiff, J, & Whitehead, J, 1996, *You and your action research project,* London: Routledge.

Macdonald, J, 2003, 'Assessing online collaborative learning: process and product', *Computer & Education*, 40, pp 377-91.

Marcinkoniene, R, & Keka¨le, T, 2007, 'Action research as culture change tool', *Baltic Journal of Management,* 2, **1**, pp 97-109.

Margaryan, A, 2008, 'Supporting instructors in innovation: a three-component approach', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 20, **6**, pp 400-15.

Marshall, C, & Rossman, G, B, 1999, *Designing qualitative research*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Mason, R, 2002, '*E-learning: What Have We Learnt?*, Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford.

McLoughlin, C, & Luca, J, 2002, 'A learner-centred approach to developing team skills through web-based learning and assessment', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 33, **5**, pp 571-82.

McLuckie, J, & Topping, K, J, 2004, 'Transferable skills for online peer learning', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 29,* **5**, pp 564-84.

McPherson, M, & Nunes, M, B, 2006, 'Organisational issues for e-learning critical success factors as identified by HE practitioners', *International Journal of Educational Management,* 20, **7**, pp 542-58.

Merrill, M. D. (1992). 'Constructivism and Instructional Design', In Duffy, T,

Jonassen, D, H, (Ed.).Constructivism and the technology of instruction: a conversation, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Meyer, K, 2002, *Quality in distance education*, San Francisco: Wiley Periodicals.

Middlesex University Module Guide Handbook, 2008.

Mills, G, E, 2003, *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher.* Ohio: Pearson Education.

Morrison, D, 2003, 'Using activity theory to design constructivist online learning environments for higher order thinking. A retrospective analysis', *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, 29, **3**.

Moon, S, Birchall, D, & Williams, S, 2005, 'Developing design principles for an e-learning programme for SME managers to support accelerated learning at the workplace', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 17, **5/6**, pp 370-84.

Moore, J, 2004, 'Living in the basement of the ivory tower: a graduate student's perspective of participatory action research within academic institutions', *Educational Action Research*, 12, **1**, pp 145-63.

Moravec, J, W, 2008, 'A new paradigm of knowledge production in higher education', *The Horizon*, 16, **3**, pp 123-36.

Neo, M, 2005, 'Web-enhanced learning: engaging students in constructivist learning', *Campus-Wide Information Systems,* 22, **1**, pp 4-14.

Newby, T, J, Stepich, D, A, Lehman, J, D, & Russell, J, D, 2000, *Instructional technology for teaching and learning: designing instruction, integrating computers, and using media*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Olaniran, B, A, 2006, 'Applying synchronous computer-mediated communication into course design: Some considerations and practical guides', *Campus-Wide Information Systems*, 23, **3**, pp 210-20.

Oliver, R, 2002, *'Winning the Toss and Electing to Bat: Maximizing the Opportunities of Online Learning',* Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford.

Osborn, M, & Theodore, C, 2005, '*Constructivist Online Pedagogy; The Trials and Tribulations of Novices',* Australian Association for Institutional Research, Australia.

Oshima, J, Oshima, R, Inagaki, S, Takenaka, M, Nakayama, H, & Yamaguchi, E. et al. 2003, 'Teachers and researchers as a design team: Changes in their relationship through a design experiment using Computer Support for Collaborative Learning (CSCL) technology', *Education, Communication, and Information*, 3, **1**, pp 105–27.

O'Sullivan, D, 2003, 'Online project based learning in innovation management', *Education+Training*, 45, **2**, pp 10-117.

Pallof, R, M, & Pratt, K, 2003, *The virtual student*, San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Park, S, Henkin, A, B, & Egley, R, 2005, 'Teacher team commitment, teamwork and trust: exploring associations', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43, **5**, pp 462-79.

Passfield, R, 2002, 'Creating innovation and synergy through a parallel action learning structure', *The Learning Organization*, 9, **4**, pp 150-58.

Patel, N, V, 2003, 'A holistic approach to learning and teaching interaction: factors in the development of critical learners', *International Journal of Educational Management*, 17, **6**, pp 272-84.

Patton, M, Q, 2002, *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, London: SAGE.

Peel, D, Shortland, S, 2004, 'Student teacher collaborative reflection: perspectives on learning together', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 41, **1**, pp 49-58.

Perkins, D, N, 1991, 'What constructivism demands of the learner', *Educational Technology*, 31, **9**, pp 19-21.

Poerksen, B, 2005, 'Learning how to learn', *Kybernetes*, 34, **3/4**, pp 471-84.

Pring, R, 2000, *Philosophy of educational research*. London: Biddles Ltd.

Rabey, G, 2003, 'Paradox of teamwork', *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 35, **4**, pp 158-62.

Ramsden, P, 1992, *Learning to teach in higher education*, London: Routledge.

Reihlen, M, & Apel, B, A, 2006, 'Internationalization of professional service firms as learning – a constructivist approach', *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 18, **2**, 140-51.

Reeves, T, C, Herrington, J, & Oliver, R, 2004, 'A development research agenda for online collaborative learning', *ETR&D*, 52, **4**, pp 53-65.

Rowley, J, 2003, 'Action research: an approach to student work based learning', *Education + Training,* 45, **3**, pp 131-38.

Saito, E, Hawe, P, Hadiprawiroc, S, & Empedhe, S, 2008, 'Initiating education reform through lesson study at a university in Indonesia', *Educational Action Research*, 16, **3**, pp 391-407.

Salmon, G, 2002, *E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning online,* London: Kogan Page.

Salter, D, Richards, L, & Carey, T, 2004, 'The 'T5' design model: An instructional model and learning environment to support the integration of online and campus based courses' *Educational Media International*, 41, **2**, pp 207-17.

Saunders, M, Lewis, P, & Thornhill, A, 2000, *Research methods for business students*, London: Prentice Hall.

Savery, J, & Duffy, T, M, 2001, *Problem based learning: An instructional model and its constructivist framework,* Centre for Research on Learning and Technology. Bloomington.

Savolainen, T, Finland, J, & Haikonen, A, 2007, 'Dynamics of organisational learning and continuous improvement in six sigma implementation', *The TQM Magazine*, 19, **1**, pp 6-17.

Schwarber, P, D, 2005, 'Leaders and the decision-making process', *Management Decision*, 43, **7/8**, pp 1086-92.

Schön, D, 1991, *The reflective practitioner*, Avebury: Ashgate Publishing.

Scott, D, & Usher, R, 1999, *Researching education: Data, methods and theory in educational enquiry*, New York: Continuum.

Silverman, D, 2005, *Doing qualitative research,* London: SAGE.

Siritongthaworn, S, & Krairit, D, 2006, 'Satisfaction in e-learning: the context of supplementary instruction', *Campus-Wide Information Systems*, 23, **2**, pp 1065-0741.

Sit, J, W, H, Chung, J, W, Y, Chow, M, C, M, & Wong, T, K, S, 2005, 'Experiences of online learning: students' perspective', *Nurse Education Today*, 25, pp 140-47.

Slotte, V, Herbert, A 2006, 'Putting professional development online: Integrating learning as productive activity', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 18, **4**, pp 235-47.

Sumanski, M, M, Kolenc, I, & Markic, M, 2007, 'Teamwork and defining group structures', *Team Performance Management*, 13, **3,4**, pp 102-16.

Stacey, E, Smith, P, J, & Barty, K, 2004, 'Adult Learners in the Workplace: Online learning and communities of Practice', *Distance Education,* 25, **1**.

Steffe, L, & Gale, J, 1995, *Constructivism in education*, Hillsdale: Erlbaum.

Tarricone, P, & Luca, J, 2002. 'Successful teamwork: A case study', *HERDSA*, 640-46.

Taylor, R, W, 2002, 'Pros and cons of online learning – a faculty perspective', *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 26, **1**, pp 24-37.

Temponi, C, 2005, 'Continuous improvement framework: implications for academia', *Quality Assurance in Education*, 13, **1**, pp 17-36.

Trent, R, J, 2003, 'Planning to use work teams effectively', *Team Performance Management: An International Journal*, 9, **3,4**, pp 50-58.

Verma, G, K, & Mallick, K, 1999, *Researching education: Perspectives and techniques,* London: Falmer Press.

von Glasersfeld, E, 1995, 'A constructivist approach to teaching' in Steffe, L, P, & J. Gale, J, (eds.) *Constructivism in education*, Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Walker, D, H, T, Anbari, F, T, Bredillet, C, Söderlund, J, Cicmil, S, & Thomas, J, 2008, 'Collaborative academic/practitioner research in project management examples and applications', *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, **1**, 2, pp 168-92.

Wallace, M, 2002, 'Managing and developing online education: issues of change and identity', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 14, **5**, pp 198-208.

Wang, M, Poole, M, Harris, B, & Wangemann, P, 2001, 'Promoting online collaborative learning experiences for teenagers', *Education Media International*, 38, **4**, pp 203-15.

Water, H, Ahaus, K, & Rozier, R, 2008, 'Team roles, team balance and performance', *Journal of Management Development*, 27, **5**, pp 499-512.

Wen, M, L, & Tsai, C, C, 2006, 'University students' perceptions of and attitudes toward (Online) peer assessment', *Higher Education*, 51, **1**, pp 27-44.

Wiensenberg, F, & Stacey, E, 2005, 'Reflections on teaching and learning online: Quality program design, delivery and support issues from a cross-global perspective', *Distance Education*, 26, **3**, pp 385-404.

Williams, L, 2007, 'A contemporary tale of participatory action research in Aotearoa/New Zealand: applying a power-culture lens to support participatory action research as a diverse and evolving practice', *Educational Action Research*, 15, **4**, pp 13-631.

Wilhelm, W, J, 2003, 'Teaching communications online using the master teacher model', *Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, 45, **1**, pp 34-47.

Wilson, B, Lowry, M, 2000, 'Constructivist Learning on the Web. Liz Burge (Ed.), *Learning technologies: Reflective and strategic thinking,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Whatley, J, & Bell, F, 2003, 'Discussion across borders: benefits for collaborative learning', *International Council for Education Media*, 40, **1/2,** pp 139-52.

Wolcott, H, S, 1995, *The art of fieldwork*, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Yeh, E, Smith, C, Jennings, C, & Castro, N, 2006, 'Team building: a 3-dimensional teamwork model', *Team Performance Management*, 12, **5/6** , pp 192-97.

Yuen, P, Y, 7 Cheng, Y, C, 2000, 'Leadership for teachers' action learning', *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 14, **5**, pp 198-209.

Zajc, L, S, & Bednarz, N, D, 2007, 'Action research and collaborative research: their specific contributions to professional development', *Educational Action Research*, 15, **4**, pp 577-97.

Zapalska, A, & Brozik, D, 2006, 'Learning styles and online education', *Campus-Wide Information Systems*, 23, **5**, pp 325-35.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

European University Association (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN UNIVERSITY

EUA EVALUATION REPORT

May 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction:

The *Eastern Mediterranean University*, set up in 1986 on the basis of an Institute of Higher Technology created in Famagusta in 1979, has followed closely the development of the Institutional Evaluation Programme for the last few years. However, it was only in 2006, after EMU joined the EUA, that Rector *Halil Güven* asked the association to evaluate his institution, the main academic provider in the northern part of the island of Cyprus.

Set up in 1994, the institutional evaluation programme has already assessed more than 150 institutions of higher education in some 35 countries, in Europe and beyond. Its aim: to help university leadership teams – especially in EUA member universities -to understand the capacity for change of their own institutions. The process is based on a self-evaluation report assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the latter, a document intended to point to areas of possible transformation, for the university to meet the challenges linked both to its role in society and to the evolution of science and pedagogy. This report is then tested and validated by a team of outside experts, usually rectors or former rectors of European universities that have undergone a similar mirroring exercise. This explains the specificity of the EUA programme, i.e. to offer a supportive review of the process of institutional development as seen through the eyes of peers and colleagues rather than a judgement by auditors of the inherent quality of university activities. After two visits to the institution under review, the group of peers submits a report to the university assessing the situation and offering recommendations for enhancing its capacity to change. This is the present document.

The Steering Committee in charge of the programme appointed the following as members of the review team for the Eastern Mediterranean University: *professor Ferdinand Devinsky* -as chair -, the former Rector of Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia, and – as members – *professors Aine Hyland* and *Bertrand Weil*, respectively the former Vice-Presidents of the University of Cork, Ireland, and of Université Paris-12 Val de Marne, France. At the request of the assessed university, a student joined the group of academic peers, on behalf of ESIB, the national unions of students in Europe: *Bastian Baumann* is a graduate student in law from the Free University of Berlin, also studying higher education at the University of Kassel, Germany. *Dr. Andris Barblan*, former Secretary General of EUA and CRE, now in charge of the Magna Charta Observatory for fundamental university values and rights in Bologna, was asked to act as the team secretary.

The team made a preliminary visit to Famagusta on Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 December 2006 to validate the findings of the self-evaluation report. This is a comprehensive, informative, complex, well-organised and dense document of some 35 pages outlining a rather difficult situation – several appendices illustrating, with position papers, graphs and figures, the development of the university over the past few years. To complete their understanding of the situation, the group asked for some complementary data that was received in time for the main visit, (12 to 14 March 2007) in order to assess the institution's potential for change.

In the two visits, the EUA group of experts discussed the university situation with: -*leaders* and *students* from **six faculties and schools** (the faculties of arts and sciences, engineering, law, education, business and the English Preparatory School – that is of special importance in an English teaching institution); -*representatives* of **outside society** (the mayor of Famagusta, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the chair of YÖDAK, the Higher Education Council for North Cyprus, as well as the President and some members of EMU Board of Trustees – for instance architects, builders and physicians committed to enlarging the university's role in the region).

There were also intense discussions with the **University leadership**: the Rector, his team and the self-evaluation team; with the key officials in the university administration in charge of accounting, quality monitoring or staff development; and last, but not least the students and staff organisations also active in institutional decision-making. The more than 250 people met by the EUA team showed vivid interest in discussing the future and potential of their university, **the oldest and largest on the island of Cyprus**. Despite a rather difficult situation characterised by the scarcity of resources, political isolation and the complexity of on-going changes, within and outside the institution, most EUA interlocutors showed keen interest in the specificity of an institution that has gambled from the first on developing a comprehensive range of studies to attract a wide audience of students well beyond Cypriot borders -as the Eastern Mediterranean reference of its name indicates. These many encounters were efficiently organised by *Mehmet Altinay*, the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, and his colleague at the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, *Nazmi Buldanlioglu*, who proved most professional in ensuring the best conditions for board and lodging – social programme included. The team would like to thank them, their staff and the many members of the university who received the EUA team for their willingness to help as well as their gracious hospitality.

The context of the evaluation

The environment: the city of Famagusta, on its southern side, borders the *Green Line* that cuts the island of Cyprus into two parts, Turkish-speaking in the North, Greek-speaking in the South. The Green Line, in fact, is a buffer zone a few kilometres wide, a no man's land where the neighbouring town of Varosha (Maras) is a ghost city that was abandoned some thirty years ago. In everyday life, this frontier means different electrical grids, different transportation systems, different economies, i.e., a real breakdown of relations between northern and southern Cypriots – who are all citizens of the European Union however, since the island, in May 2004, joined the EU as a whole.

The moment: the Annan plan, accepted by the Northern Cypriots but rejected by the Southern Cypriot majority in April 2004, represented the latest and, in our opinion, missed opportunity to face the obvious – two communities -by offering political legitimacy to all parts of the island. However, the wall that had divided for decades the main thoroughfare in old Nicosia was demolished in March 2007 – perhaps a sign of growing exchanges between the people of the island. As far as the academic community is concerned, **the European Higher Education Area** has also become the reference for possible integration into an international environment of real scope. This is true for the two communities. Anyway, considering that the Republic of Cyprus joined **the European Cultural Convention** in 1969 (when the island was still one entity), which legitimises an **inclusion in the Bologna process**, the Turkish minority contends that it has been brought into the agreement *de facto*, all the more so as the Constitution of 1960 devolved power to the two communities as far as education and culture were concerned, like in most federal states. As a result, North Cyprus is asking the London conference of Ministers of Education in May 2007 to recognise that matter as a fact justifying the official inclusion of its institutions of higher education into the Bologna process towards 2010 and the finalisation of the European Higher Education Area.

Constraints and institutional norms

For the evaluation group, *constraints* are the elements given by the situation that the institution must take into account – with little chance to change them, in the near future at least. Obvious ones are the **scarcity of resources**; others are more hidden and perhaps more

important in terms of institutional capacity for change as they reflect the **mentality and culture** of the region and its people.

Background: The northern part of Cyprus is small and has a population of less than 260 000 people (some 200 000 being Turkish Cypriots) – a little community for the setting up of some 6 universities! Six universities may make sense only if they are part of the larger Turkish academic community, thus serving students from Turkey as an offshore centre of training services. This is what has indeed happened. At present, some **39 000 young people are involved in TRNC higher education**, with 26 000 students (66.66%) coming from Turkey through the ÖSS selection process supervised by YÖK, the Higher Education Council in Ankara. As a result, the Northern Cypriots themselves only represent a quarter of the total number of students in the northern part of the island, with another 3 000 students coming from non-European parts of the world, the Middle East, Pakistan, Iran, Nigeria and the Cameroon,
– a large part of these 'international' students is enrolled at EMU where teaching is provided in English. The Northern Cypriot identity of its higher education is thus at risk, since no other country has less than 25% of its nationals in its own institutions of higher education. Since 2004, moreover, the reality of EU citizenship calls for differentiated relations with Turkey and for the reaffirmation of the Cypriot identity as it opens to a much wider and varied community of belonging – so much so that Northern Cypriots now tend to register in English-speaking universities in Western Europe, as a way to breaking their isolation at individual level. Should this trend grow, the actual link of higher education in North Cyprus to the people of the island could become weaker still, with the young voting with their feet to achieve a normal existence on the continent they belong to. This could also be the consequence of the refusal of the Annan plan in the South, a situation regularly mentioned by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights – as recently as March this year when, in his report to the Human Rights Council, he wrote that 'Turkish Cypriot students continue to be confronted with lack of access to the Erasmus, Socrates and Bologna processes or other European scholarship programmes. The issue has been linked to the non-recognition of Northern Cypriot universities. The right to education is a fundamental right, and the current situation prevents the free movement of students and staff and constrains academic freedom, the exchange of ideas and international competition'.

Economy: The northern part of the island lives on a budget of some 600 million US dollars (2006), local revenues covering only half that sum. The other half of the budget is supported by grants and subsidies from Turkey. Without it, the system would collapse even if the area enjoys a high level of GDP growth (10% in 2006) driven mainly by higher education and tourism. In other words, public money is scarce in the north. Nevertheless, higher education should be an important economic focus in these balancing efforts since it represents a key 'industry' in the northern part of the island, the reduction of which would have terribly destabilising consequences. Recently, direct trade between the two parts of the island has begun and EU money has been set aside from the structural funds to help develop infrastructures in the north.

Culture: Cyprus is part of the old Eastern Mediterranean culture that draws on a Roman and Ottoman past. This means that, next to the official system of rules and regulations, parallel structures of allegiance to the group and the family may validate or invalidate, may weaken or reinforce, decisions taken at public level. Knowing the right person could, sometimes, become more important than possessing the relevant piece of legislation. In fact, this adds another layer to the decision-making process, thus offering a more personal touch to the system of democratic deliberations. This could induce political arrangements that do not usually have the public good of the collective taken as a whole at heart. Political parties or social groupings thus may become key players in higher education.

In such a situation, any university must struggle, consciously and unconsciously, with the geographical, historical, cultural, legal, political and institutional factors the balancing of which for a constructive future requires **redefining its academic role, identity and ambitions**.

Such is the challenge the EUA team felt was being faced at the *Eastern Mediterranean University*, a name that articulates its specificity. From 1986 – when, under the sponsorship of YÖK in Ankara, it was decided to provide higher education to northern Cyprus -to 2004 and the referendum proposed by the 'Annan plan' for the reunification of Cyprus, EMU seems to have grown as an outpost of Turkish higher education, its specificity being its teaching in English (a not uncommon fact in Turkish higher education where several prestigious institutions conduct their work in foreign languages). In 2004, however, the '*cypriotisation'* of EMU could be envisaged, with the aim of turning the institution – the oldest and the largest in the island -into a centre of learning for Cyprus as a whole, **a bridge** between peoples, cultures and nations of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Distancing themselves from Turkey did not equate to navel gazing but supposed collaboration with the Greek speaking University of Cyprus in Nicosia, while reinforcing the international specificity of the institution. This meant **investing in foreign students and foreign staff** in order to balance the Turkish influence that had presided over EMU beginnings. The failure of the Annan plan left EMU in an uncomfortable position, its ambitions being dampened, and several of its members wondering if the best solution did not consist in accepting its satellite status of the Turkish higher education system -certainly not the best way to live up to the name of the institution. Others considered that the international strategy associated with the name of Prof. Halil Güven, the Rector appointed on the eve of the 2004 referendum with a vision of the enlarged role EMU could play in the area, was worth pursuing – despite adverse circumstances. Thus linkages with outside partners should remain the cornerstone of a strategy that could, in the long run, pave the way to *de facto* reintegration of EMU in the Cypriot landscape of higher education -Europe acting as the gateway to international acknowledgement.

Assessment of the present-day situation

The people: EMU's present leadership wants to close the gap between the academic reality in Famagusta and its partial isolation by many countries of the world. EMU is no ghost institution, indeed it caters for some 15 000+ students registered in 7 Faculties – covering most fields except medicine -, in 2 schools (Computing and Technology; Tourism and Hospitality) as well as in English preparatory courses; these students use a rather splendid campus not far from the sea shore, on the edge of the city, a campus neatly organised and well endowed – especially if one considers the scarcity of means in the TRNC. The EUA team, in its many meetings, could appreciate the vitality of EMU, an institution of relevance for Turkish Cypriots (3 845 of them in this academic year) but also for Turkish nationals (8 236) who represent an overwhelming proportion of the student body not to speak of the young people with other national backgrounds (2 002). With 621 academics, **the staff/student ratio** oscillates between 12,7 in Engineering and 50,9 in Law – not uncommon figures in European higher education. **The teaching staff** is mainly Northern Cypriot (many of them having been trained in foreign universities) but 77 come from Turkey and another 91 from the rest of the world – a rather high presence of foreigners if compared with average institutions of higher education in Europe.

One of EMU's *weak points* is the declining number of students of Northern Cypriot origin, a 26% decrease from its level of 2002/2003 (5 216) that is compensated by a 17% increase of Turkish students (from 7 044 to 8 236) during the same period. In parallel,

students from elsewhere have grown by 43% from 1 403 in 2002/2003 to 2 002 today. Thus, all in all, EMU has remained stable over the last five years, with a 3% increase of some 420 students only. **The decrease of local students**, especially in 2005 and 2006, seems to reflect the advantage Northern Cypriots can take of their EU citizenship to obtain degrees more easily recognised in the world than those taken at EMU. As for the Turks, EMU's intake depends very much on the results of the entrance exams all candidates to Turkish higher education have to take (ÖSS). The level of achievement of candidates accepted in various institutions is modulated in Ankara, thus influencing the quality and numbers of EMU's potential students coming from Turkey. This dependency could be detrimental to EMU since the university does not really fix the conditions of access to its services. The EUA team heard, however, that the recent upgrading of the criteria decided in Ankara has led to a flow into Famagusta of better qualified Turkish students, a fact of importance considering that more than 60% of students at EMU come from its northern neighbour. The EUA experts felt that

counting on Turkish students to ensure the stability of student numbers at EMU is risky

since the receiving institution has little influence on who and how many may be invited to go to North Cyprus. When YÖK in Ankara changes its access policies, as it did recently, thus reducing drastically the number of students accepted in the system, this has immediate consequences on the island. Perhaps this is why, in the TRNC, efforts have been made to set up a Higher Education Council of their own, YÖDAK, that has just started to run entrance exams on the ÖSS model for the Northern Cypriots who had been accepted directly until then by each of the universities in the TRNC. It is too early to judge if, to counterbalance the Northern Cypriots' attraction to EU universities, YÖDAK could be tempted to lower entry qualifications.

The contingent from other countries is linked much more to the policies of EMU itself and, over the last few years, campaigns have been made to recruit students from Asia and Africa, with EMU representatives stationed in some of the target countries like Iran or Pakistan. The opening to nations, often with an English tradition, kills two birds with one stone: ensuring the better use of English-speaking teachers in Famagusta, on the one hand, and, on the other, bringing to Northern Cyprus students used to expressing themselves in English in their everyday life so that the Turkish-speaking students may be encouraged to switch from their native language to the *lingua franca* of our day and time -also outside of their courses.

The finances: Public universities usually depend for a good part of their income on the grants and subsidies from the government – up to 80% of their needs in several European countries. EMU, although public, **earns most of its finances through the fees** asked from its students since they cover some 2/3 of the 60 million Euros needed to pay last year's current costs. The main support from central authorities in the TRNC is supposed to come from **the compensation** the government has committed to in order to reduce by half the cost of studies for Cypriot nationals. The EUA team was rather surprised to hear that disbursement of the millions this represents, although promised, was often delayed. This contributes to the university **running deficits** on a regular basis, a sum representing, for the last academic year, 19% of the current budget. This obliges EMU to count on banks loans in order to cover some 6% of its regular expenditures. Efforts are certainly made to obtain *consultancy mandates* to fill the gap between needs and income but this proves rather difficult in a region with no real industrial development. Anyway, the revenue from consultancy work comes from the university itself, with no real support from public authorities. As for the investment budget, it depends nearly totally on earmarked grants from Turkey. The EUA team wondered indeed if it would not be *easier for EMU to become a private institution* – free to decide about its fees and to sell its services -at cost price at least. The visitors were told that this was not possible since the government of TRNC or Turkey would never allow the only

state university of North Cyprus to become bankrupt. In other words, the public status of EMU seems to represent a life insurance policy. Looking at the problem from a governmental point of view, the EUA evaluators deemed strange such slim support considering that the nation depends mainly on higher education to drive, together with tourism, the development of the region. Could not the success of the sector in attracting thousands of young people in North Cyprus be encouraged by real investments supporting the attractiveness of academic activities – in terms of infrastructure or support for foreign staff, for instance, when their conditions of service could be improved to levels comparable to what exists in their own countries?

If there is no financial back up to support the legal interest authorities have in defining EMU's administrative rules, this results, at best, in a weak institutional ***sense of accountability*** to the representatives of the nation. At worst, EMU members might deem they are taken advantage of by those people who benefit from the presence of a large university in the country – bringing money and employment to a city whose harbour has lost much significance after the embargo imposed on the TRNC, for instance. Indeed, with a population of some 50 000, Famagusta hosts today some 15 000+ students – a 30% proportion that would make it a university town in any other country. In 1996, the 8 500 students of EMU represented 21% of a population of 35 000. In other words, over the last ten years, the growth of the university seems to have been the motor of the 30% increase in the population of Famagusta. The EUA team was told by the local authorities that this was certainly the case but, apart from partnerships for water recycling and desalination or for cultural events, no real long term financial encouragement – even in terms of **subsidised bus fares for the students** seemed to be envisaged although the construction boom in the area was certainly beneficial to local finances. Economic representatives recognised the importance of these new activities – as stimulated by EMU in the region -but considered that embargoed industry needed more support than universities if it is to survive and develop in better times – also as an expected stimulus to academic activities. Anyway, in the growing building industry, the **need was not for graduates** but for carpenters, masons, plumbers and electricians – all trades that needed to be imported from outside at a great cost. In short, the university was not considered as really relevant to the immediate needs of the community; even the ***techno-park*** may be perceived as an answer to future problems and, thus, is seen by stakeholders as useless for the moment. In any case – perhaps because of the uncertainty of the situation -the university was seen as slow to move, not ready to take risks, indeed as a spoilt child with too much staff, an object of envy. For the evaluators, **EMU is not at the core of town interests**: it was also obvious that the university, at that level too, has difficulty in being seen as a real – if not the main provider of wealth and prestige in the region. The EUA team wondered in fact what would happen to Famagusta if EMU, for whatever reason, had to close down: this would certainly result in economic depression and could have a domino effect on North Cyprus as a whole. In other words, if any public institution is to be accountable to society – and EMU seems ready to help define the collective needs of the group -**society also has obligations** to that body. This means ensuring the best conditions for its development – at regional or local level. This is no one way street but an implicit agreement of partnership that could even be turned into an explicit contract that would determine each other's duties and services. Otherwise, EMU might feel a foreign body in its own territory. This is again a matter of reality that needs to be proven to all, in or outside the country.

The organisation

In the case of EMU, there is one structure that exists as a partner for dialogue to discuss and sustain the conditions of today to a foreseeable and planned future: **the *Board of Trustees***. An interface between government and the university, consisting mainly of non

academic members who represent the local community, the Board does not have more funds than the government it emanates from. Its mandatory role as a financial controller – checking the past – then takes over its strategic function – envisaging the future. Since it cannot provide the conditions of better times to come, the Board of Trustees is tempted into **administrative micro-management** of the legal and financial propriety of executive moves made at institutional level. As a result, and with no professional academic basis, it duplicates the role of EMU leadership, thus binding the latter into a maze of interventions that act as a brake rather than an engine for the future, which should be the Board's role. The EUA team heard complaints that, through detailed accounting procedures, the Board in fact decides about the teaching/learning orientation of curricula. It also heard that career development of the staff engaged in an English-speaking environment was blocked by the low interest the Board had in this matter – rather academic, perhaps, but essential for the future of the university. In other words, the trustees do not have the means of their ambitions, i.e., the funds that, for the university, would justify the call for its accountability. Rather than acting as a buffer between the authorities and EMU, the Board mirrors the government's monitoring role and finds itself in conflict with the institution it should defend and represent.

Basically, the university is owned by a ***Foundation*** *whose state-appointed Board* also acts as the trustee organ supposed to mediate between the needs of civil society and the provision of services EMU can render to meet those needs. A charter – called the university law in Famagusta – organised the university in 1986. It is now under review. The university is the main legal entity and is led by the rector – appointed by the Board on behalf of the government. Contrast this with the situation, for example, in the Netherlands where such a corporate organisation means that the Ministry appoints a Board of non-academics, which appoints the rector, who appoints the Deans, who appoint the department chairs. This chain of command corresponds to the line of responsibilities: chairs or departments are responsible for the use of the funds received from the Deans; Deans are responsible for the use of Faculty funds received from the Rector; the Rector is responsible for the funds received from the Board; and, finally, the Board is responsible for the funds received from the Ministry. Obligations thus dovetail with responsibilities. In North Cyprus, as mentioned earlier, the obligations do not correspond to responsibilities: the scheme is biased since resources do not flow from the top but are gathered at the bottom, for the moment by the university central offices. ***Faculties***, however, are very much aware of the number of the students they serve – that is, of their contribution to the university budget: they would not mind being rewarded for their attractiveness, i.e., the number of students they accept. This factor is difficult to evaluate since each Faculty has a specific history having been created at different times. For instance, the older Faculty of Engineering and that of Computing and Technology are considered the strong points of EMU – backed by good research; less research-oriented and younger Faculties like Business Administration and Law seem to be more popular however. To take account of those differences, the present administration is now trying to devolve considerable **financial responsibilities to the Faculties** – so that, for instance, they may regulate the recruitment policy -an important privilege in a university where staff costs represent 80 to 90% of the budget. However, final decisions about personnel are always referred to the Board of Trustees, since its approval is needed for all decisions with financial consequences. The EUA team had the impression that empowering the deans could backfire if the formal management structure keeps them under tutelage. All the more so, as the Faculties tend to go it alone as though they were not accustomed to working together – with the exception of those, like Art and Science, that service given departments in other Faculties that require basic teaching in mathematics, physics or languages. Thus, the possible transfer of responsibilities to units through funding was not really clearly understood in many places. It is as if the culture of risk that this presupposes is not mature yet; people have long been accustomed to

obtaining their scarce resources for action in a semi-automatic manner, directly from a centre that takes a 30% overhead for university-wide activities.

The *Academic Senate* is another important structure in the organisational chart of EMU. However, as its remit is limited to academic affairs only, its work consists mainly in course evaluation and programme development in teaching and research – the fundamental activities of any university like EMU. By law, however, it does not discuss the organisational and financial consequences of the changes it might propose to improve academic affairs. The EUA team felt that this sharp division of **responsibilities between the Senate and the Board was not fully appropriate** considering that means should follow the ends. After all, it is of no use to decide to increase the learning content of curricula in order to develop a university centred on student experience rather than professors' expertise – an implication of the Bologna process – if the logistics cannot follow (more tutorials, more small working rooms, longer library opening hours, for instance) for obvious lack of resources. At least the framework of potential support should be made clear to Senate members so that they do not feel discouraged by the unreality of academic debates – that might remain 'academic' indeed. Moreover, apart from the Rector chairing the meetings, there was no direct line between the EMU executive and the Senate as the institution's legislative body. This was remedied when the leadership team was reorganised in February 2007: a Vice rector for Academic Affairs was appointed with, among other responsibilities, the mandate for quality development in university activities.

Quality strategies

How can one create a sense of belonging to EMU in the university community? This seems to be one of the main problems of the university and its leaders. In order to create an EMU ***common identity*** – as if the existence of the *institution as such* had to be proved not only outside the campus but also among its members – the present university leaders have decided to base group energy on becoming an internationally recognised academic body (hence the importance of the EUA and IAU memberships acquired in 2005) and to streamline a body of common references that would offer shared language and values to the institution as a whole (that is why quality performance has become a central concern over the last two years). True, all administrative units have to be certified **ISO 9001** by 2009 – an on-going process that, by now, has been implemented in several services. The English Preparatory School has been also innovating when forming **'quality circles'** of some fifteen staff members asked to support each other in function of the problems met – as they arise. Moreover, there have been structured quality exercises in various faculties in order to analyse their lines of academic interest: for instance, the Faculty of Business and Economics has started a process of accreditation with the help of **AASCB**, the US professional association that looks into the credibility of teaching in business administration in America, but also overseas, when it is invited to do so. The Faculty of Engineering has recently completed a similar process with **ABET**, the main accrediting agency in the technological field in North America. Using the US as a benchmark, however, could seem somewhat contrary to the will of EMU to gamble on Europe and the acceptance of the Bologna process as the key to its institutional identity.

Therefore at *EMU level*, EUA is considered the main benchmark to refer to, if it is to validate its claim to become a partner in the construction of the European Higher Education Area, i.e., a fully credible partner in European eyes. Thus European discussions of quality matter. When the EUA team arrived in mid-December for its first visit, it was greeted by large signs hung onto the Venetian walls of the old city announcing proudly, under the EUA blue logo, that **'Quality is our passion'**. These flags were not for the evaluation team's benefit, however, but represented what was left of an awareness-raising campaign in the university

and in its environment about the desired identity of EMU as a European provider of academic services. Indeed, the intranet system of the university was also beaming everywhere in the institution the quality 'creed' found in various documents of the Institutional Evaluation Programme of EUA – that has become in Famagusta the institutional 'banner for change'. As a matter of fact, within EMU, electronic tools are at the heart of the ***communication strategy*** of the rector and his team.

For instance, the various drafts of the Self Evaluation Report were disseminated throughout the campus on the web, students and staff having direct access to the document with the possibility of commenting and amending those parts they were unhappy with. In the same way, when the strategic plan was discussed, electronic consultation was used to test the interest of the proposals that were also being negotiated with different partners in the institutions and beyond. **Student evaluations of their teachers** are also put on the web, the students of some faculties being much more participative than others. The results of those electronic enquiries are not made public. The professors, in several departments, still have to be convinced that **transparency is to the long term benefit of EMU**. However, the results of the students' global satisfaction survey are made public. The EUA team recognised in these various efforts the recommendations made by the IEP to universities willing to ***develop a quality culture*** that goes beyond meeting specific performance indicators in a bureaucratic way. The idea is to involve all members of the institution in the discussions affecting their own judgement of university activities. The EUA team, however, wondered if making public documents on the web can count as making staff and students real partners in a joint venture run under the flag of EMU. Indeed, the return of answers usually seemed rather low, almost as if university members did not feel especially motivated to enter into a constructive dialogue – not only among the students who, as a rule, indicated that they did not see the results of their remarks on staff performances. In other words, is the web publication of texts and papers an opinion poll or is it the opening of a democratic debate? In market research, indeed, the questioner wants to know the needs of the group being surveyed; thus, the supplier can adapt to demand. In a university, however, that wants to become a ***community of belonging***, questions should be the basis for a dialogue between equal but different people, so that opinions can be forged and policies turned around, if proved necessary. This means developing ***forums of discussion*** tolerant of the unexpected. Such a deeper understanding of 'consultancy' explains perhaps the recent setting up of ***'student platforms'*** where some 200 students meet in one room and point to what needs to be fixed, from their own point of view. Then, following TQM principles, the Vice-Rector for academic affairs must answer these queries in less than a month, saying what has gone wrong and why, if complaints prove justified. Gathering people together, however, does not turn them into partners for discussions on the future of the institution, i.e., members responsible for its development. This would mean ***moving from awareness to consciousness*** – at both individual and group level.

The EUA team heard a lot about the **need for democracy** but felt that the definition above – the possibility to explore a problem and imagine its solution in common – was often obscured by the factionalised approach to representation of opinions. The important thing for the various partners was to be represented on the bodies that count, the Board of Trustees in particular. Lobbying capacity as an understanding of democracy was very much part of the discourse of **the Unions** which insisted upon being given a place in all decision-making circles. The 'direct' democracy tried by EMU leadership could be felt as a threat for representative organisational models and might explain some of the disappointment expressed by several staff members who had supported the change process initiated by the present Rector when he started surfing on the hopes of national reconciliation in early 2004. Europe, today, or international acknowledgement, may seem to many an illusion not worth pursuing any longer since, over the last two years, the strategy of European credibility has not brought

the legitimacy it was supposed to provide despite the dispersed efforts made at changing curricula or at adopting ECTS along the lines of the Bologna process. This effort, however, can be seen as limited to credit accumulation alone considering the minimal mobility with European universities that has ensued. Dampened hopes, unfortunately, do not build trust.

Making sense of one's own place in society

If the EUA visitors are right, the main problem in EMU today is to make sense of the many aspects of its academic and local environment where questions of acceptance of the past and review of the present overlap with each other very much on the model of Russian dolls. **Students and staff must believe in their university** to make the institution strong as an academic provider. **The institution must feel clear about its identity** in order to become a constructive partner in the development of its region. **The 'town' must be confident** in the potential contributions of the 'gown' to defend EMU's role in the organisation of higher education in North Cyprus. **The TRNC authorities must consider** the university as an asset in their own struggle for recognition as a Cypriot community vis-à-vis Turkey or the rest of the world. Such an axis is all the more important so that change, with no overall understanding, should not be perceived as simple agitation – thus falling into the trap of fakes and useless arguments, very much like on a Shakespearean stage.

In view of the partial isolation EMU and North Cyprus suffer from, the EUA team commends the strategy launched by the present rector – **international acknowledgement used as a common axis** around which all the *matrioshkas* mentioned above are to determine the how's and why's of their own existence. This is both EMU's target and *raison d'être* – as summed up in the Eastern Mediterranean segment of its official name. However, at field level, the EUA team was surprised by the low awareness of the necessary image the university has to project outside, a challenge often by-passed because of the urgency of the immediate moment: most of the people met focus on their daily problems – meeting students in crammed facilities, coaching their progress while giving between 12 to 15 hours of courses a week – a load that does not allow interest in the didactical support of individuals nor commitment to the research supposed to renew teaching by opening the minds to innovation and unexpected truths. **The heavy work load of professors** also translates into **the heavy work load of students**, thus condemning both groups – with some exceptions -to traditional 'lecture theatre' pedagogy. This is reinforced in Faculties like Law that, for instance, hire professors from Turkey who jet to Famagusta for two or three days of courses every two weeks. Obviously, these teachers cannot be fully dedicated to their students in North Cyprus -who regret the little chance they have of meeting those teachers when wishing to develop their own learning potential – or, even, when needing supervision for graduate work. In other fields, however, professors – despite the load of activities – are exploring new approaches to learning and take part in discussions on the ways to move from teaching to learning outcomes, a debate initiated by the will to follow the guidelines of the Bologna process. This often means they have little time to look over their shoulder, for instance, to the situation of academic provision in the Eastern Mediterranean, their official turf. The international opportunities at EMU itself could be taken better advantage of considering that the institution is already rather international with some 14% of non-Turkish native speakers, both among students and among teachers. However, this may open an unresolved question, that of the place of Turkey either as a foreign power or as a supporter of a wide cultural community that integrates North Cyprus. EMU could indeed face the question as an institution with a critical approach to even the most difficult problems, thus becoming the re-inventor of the Cypriot contribution to the specificity of the university and of the island -now that it is part of the European Union. The EU, as an international ground for a differentiated identity, has become a reality that could

help redefine the allegiances to the northern neighbour – a question that needs the capacity of objective reasoning to legitimise academic action.

The redefinition of an EMU identity should help frame the campaign of acknowledgement the university must launch to make it explicit. That is why EMU, as a member of the family of European universities, should go on doing all it can – for instance through EUA that represents all European universities – to develop the relations between EMU and the University of Cyprus, strictly on academic terms, thus planting the seeds of a new reality at a time when the separation is hindering more than helping the development of the island as a whole. This is certainly no easy proposition. As for the rest of the world – even if there are students and staff who would prefer the support of some American and Asian universities in order to be seen as a partner in world development -, the EUA team understands that, considering the whole island has become part of the European Union, non-European contacts and collaboration are certainly important but secondary to the links to Europe. This explains also why EMU would like to be given an *Erasmus charter*, not only as acknowledgement by the outside but also as a proof in its own ranks of the validity of its gamble on Europe. It would also legitimise the transformation of the institution when taking full account of the Bologna process, from study architecture, credits and diploma supplement to quality action. Even the 'social dimension' of the process might be met. Thus, in March 2007, EMU decided **to allot 10% of the seats in decision-making bodies to students**. In the reappraisal of its identity, the university must also reflect further on its **English-speaking specificity**: professors and students complained that the knowledge of English as a teaching language was often insufficient, especially when students arrived from Turkey with very little understanding of the medium. In a year of preparatory courses, it proves difficult to bring that knowledge up to an academic level, especially when the students live daily in a Turkish-speaking environment. As a result, professors complain that 4-year curricula are often completed in 6 to 7 years, thus reducing the 'efficiency' and increasing the cost of teaching at EMU when compared to other institutions. Can EMU select better-trained students as far as English is concerned – a problem that does not apply to the Asian or African students who arrive in Famagusta with a higher fluency? Or should it move to English taught to empower students with the knowledge of terms that are used in the particular discipline of their interest? Or should it turn the preparatory year into a kind of *studium generale* open to all kinds of general subjects that would help students open to a much wider understanding of their place in society? Or should remedial teaching be offered on a regular basis in order to help all students achieve expected results? Or might Turkish be used in remedial courses when specific learning outcomes need to be reached? All these questions were broached in the discussions the EUA team had about the use of a 'foreign' language at EMU, a language that should immediately give the university a strong international identity. The problem is linked to the student culture – another element that must be considered in the redefinition of EMU's academic profile for the future. Students are active in the many clubs and activities that enrich the cultural life of a city: not an easy task considering that some of the non Turkish-speaking students, although they like the security and peace of Famagusta as a living place, also hoped, when they came, to arrive in a less 'provincial' city whose many young people would 'colour' daily life with more flamboyant happenings, both in work and leisure. The programme of general culture the university provides (the so-called **Spike project**) was heavily criticised for its irrelevance for undergraduates – especially considering that it called for compulsory attendance, sometimes of conferences spoken in languages not understood by all students (like Turkish) or focused on topics of little interest for opening the minds of listeners to new ideas, also in ideological and political terms. This general education offer was better accepted at graduate level, however.

The EUA team considered that the ***revisited identity of EMU*** would thus call for a change of culture among students so that they accept playing a part in academic politics in the various committees now opened to them. The passivity that was normal as long as their representation was symbolic should now be replaced by a much more pro-active attitude that also supposes better preparation and information on the potential of choices to be made for the university. That implies a reorganisation of EMU along the lines of 'partnership' rather than 'consumption'; this means a new student culture based on feed-back and communication with the colleagues represented. Such a change of culture would also be in the interest of other interlocutors in the university, the unions in particular. For all university members, the challenge of specificity is by no means a small one and meeting it might certainly help EMU to open up new lines of action that could make it a necessary partner not only in Famagusta but also in Cyprus as a whole not to speak of the Eastern Mediterranean, including Turkey.

Capacity for change

The constraints mentioned in the first part of this report are being met or taken advantage of not only by the various policies the university leadership has been advocating over the last three years but also by the many initiatives taken in Faculties or Schools by staff and students, both at individual and collective level. The EUA team visited a vibrant institution although, sometimes, the actions taken were not cross-fertilising each other or converging towards a single goal for lack of communication or lack of confidence in the work, ideas and action of colleagues and partners. There is a culture of doubt about the real prospects of EMU -and recent salary cuts, although accepted by staff, certainly do not help the buoyancy of an institution where the precariousness of many positions does not encourage the feeling of being part of a unique venture that is worth the effort. This is very much linked to the 'poverty' of an institution that, basically, relies on its students' fees. However the EUA visitors also encountered many staff committed to the development of the institution – both in administration and among the teachers and researchers – even if the latter have a marginal place now supported by the institution with only 1% of the budget. Transformation work has begun in many areas. It needs to crystallise along a few common lines so that the institution becomes a *true community of belonging*.

The students: from passivity to commitment

EMU has just initiated two new moves encouraging student participation: **the student forum and the 10% student representation in all decision-making bodies**. This is still very new and cannot be evaluated yet. However, these measures, if used to encourage the learning of a culture of commitment to the institution, should help students build up *trust in EMU*, as their own institution.

The staff: from defensive to pro-active behaviour

EMU, from a mode of protection of different interests that divide rather than unite the institution, should move to a **culture of partnership** in which staff contribute not only comments but also proposals. Such a discussion cannot be avoided if the university is to become a community all its members feel part of. This implies tolerance of others (who are not to be categorised in ideological terms) so that **transparency** opens on the unexpected, thus reducing to a minimum the fears of many to lose the little they have acquired in a difficult situation, be it cultural, political or economic. The leadership should offer stable points of reference, some kind of framework that helps conversations converge remembering that ***a university is always more than the sum of its parts***. Until now, most changes have been initiated through the aggregation of suggestions, coming from here and there, with a vision of EMU's future so distant that it could look as unreal as many of the institution's features – since isolation questions EMU's reality. That is the true basis for mistrust among partners.

The international dimension, the Eastern Mediterranean one in particular, should then become the normal reference that gives meaning to varied proposals and helps prioritise them. Indeed, not everything can be done and criteria for the *distribution of scarcity* will need to be accepted so that solidarity grows among the Faculties and Schools that are all parts of the same venture. This could have consequences on the revisited profile of the institution considering, for example, the mismatch of student demand – very much centred on business administration and economics – with supply, where the strong fields of EMU are engineering and technology, also in terms of resources, equipment and facilities. Who should help whom in a world of scarcity, how and what for? These are some the questions that will need reflection if EMU is to move from a defensive to a pro-active behaviour with the staff being considered as the main 'stakeholders' of the university's future.

The institution: becoming a community of belonging

Changes are in the offing since the university charter is reaching the last stages of its reappraisal. It seems that, on some key points, it will align obligations and responsibilities. The EUA team can only welcome, for instance, the **budgetary devolution** to the Deans, who will have real power to manage Faculty resources – including salaries that will vary in function of merit. However, this will work only on condition that deans are fully responsible to central leadership for the use of those monies, the rector representing the university as a whole – with its specific mission. Devolution should never lead to fiefdoms taking over the working margin that EMU should have as an institution. The EUA team heard a lot about the ***need for autonomy***: as far as it is concerned, and as shown in most European universities, institutional autonomy encompasses and makes sense of the initiatives taken at faculty or school level. It is never the result of those initiatives. Were it so, the institution would become a simple confederation of power brokers led by a weak rector with a representative function only. Everywhere in the European Higher Education Area rectors tend to have more and more responsibilities for the on-going development of their institution – especially if they have to report to the authorities that are providing taxpayers' money, either directly through the Ministry or, indirectly, through a Board of Trustees that supervises the long term strategies of the university and validates its financial practices vis-à-vis the government as the ultimate paymaster.

However, if the EUA team has been well informed, it would feel most disturbed in terms of **EMU's *capacity for change*** if the Board of Trustees of the older law were now to be supported by an Advisory Committee of some 30 people, not to speak of an Inspectorate and a Secretariat to co-ordinate these various bodies. As long as the government of the Board does not have the funds to justify its power, there is no reason to multiply the seats with the sole consequence of offering enough places for representatives from all pressure groups in the organisation. This is probably the best way to paralyse the system a little further even if the Board might be encouraged to delegate its powers, especially those with an executive dimension, to the Rector. This is supposed to rehabilitate the position of the university leader. Like in industry, **the rector should be the highest executive officer**, however, and, as such, he should report to the shareholders, the 'owners' of the firm – which is in some way the role of the Board as the directing group of the State Foundation 'owning' EMU.

The whole exercise involving EUA has been part of the ***strategy of presence*** started with the 2004 referendum. The rector saw the period of his mandate – that ends in 2009 – as **the *window of opportunity*** to transform EMU into a real academic player in the Eastern Mediterranean, a way out its isolation. At the time of this final report of the evaluation of EMU, there are still two years to go. This could explain the renewal of the leadership group in February 2007, an opportunity to increase the number of Vice-rectors and tighten their portfolio of responsibilities. The danger, of course, is to speed up changes that could prove

artificial if the rank and file is not brought on board. Expectations have been high, but so has disappointment. This change of personnel should be more than a last-ditch attempt at turning around a difficult situation. Well managed – with people fully dedicated to the success of EMU as an institution like those the EUA visitors met -this new effort should prove the right one to fulfil the great potential of EMU as a full academic provider.

Recommendations

Below are some suggestions for change derived from the EUA analysis that has also informed EMU reflections in the drafting of the self-evaluation report. These remarks could help the institution to focus and use its talents and past successes as effectively as possible – even in a transformed structural set-up -as analysed in the preceding pages.

Making the most of its *academic assets*, present and potential, EMU should revisit its identity and defend its unique profile of activities at all levels of academic recognition – thus obtaining its political autonomy from its various mentors, present or future, despite scarce human and financial resources. This means reinforcing its role as a *student-centred institution* consciously caring for the *quality of academic activities* enlightened by scholarship as much as by research and innovation. Europe as a benchmark should remain the reference of a common venture in institutional development that leads to setting up for North Cyprus a truly international university with English as a medium of learning and communication.

A. The university's mission and vision

EMU's self-evaluation report puts its vision in a nutshell: 'Aiming for the Peak of Quality', a motto that, for the institution, means reaching the highest European and international standards of excellence in learning, teaching and research. This is a common goal in many universities around the world, however. This mission needs to be revisited in view of EMU's present isolation, especially by ***redefining the 'bridge' role*** it would like to play in the Eastern Mediterranean. Practically, in the complex environment typical of the region, it would help decision-making if the 'vision' were discussed in a document other than ***the 'mission statement'***. The latter ***should set out EMU's role*** and the allegiances this implies for the institution vis-à-vis its present and potential supporters, on the island and in the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean. Then, this mission statement can become the framework for the ***mission statements of individual faculties and institutes*** that will reflect the specific character of individual subunits, while keeping within the framework of EMU's new circumstances.

B. The university's strategic plan

The translation of a modern university vision and mission into activities such as teaching and research is commonly articulated in a strategic development plan. EMU did not present the EUA team with such a specific document. The many objectives of the institution were spread over the Self Evaluation Report but with no sense of ***prioritisation***. The review team understands that the drafting by EMU of a strategic plan is nearing completion: it is recommended that the criteria and tools for the selection of possible activities be made explicit so that this document is of use as a management tool for university development.

Thus ***discussion should start*** on a university-wide basis to agree ***on a few basic, carefully chosen priorities and attainable goals*** which should then develop into ***a detailed and realistic financial plan*** with concrete sums allocated to each project**.** As in the case of the mission statement, the university strategic documents should become the framework for ***strategic plans elaborated by the faculties***.

To allow for institutional cohesion, it is recommended that some ***cross-university projects*** involving all the faculties, schools and institutes be put in place. Supported by central grants from a university ***stimulation fund***, such transversal projects should be supervised by EMU as a whole. One such programme could be the systematic ***introduction of curricula that are comparable and compatible with those used in the European Higher Education Area.*** This would mean that EMU move away from the US credit system now prevailing in the university or at least make it compatible with the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS). A second project could be the ***elaboration of a comprehensive quality assurance and enhancement system for the whole university***, so that the many and varied quality efforts made by staff and students in different contexts are encompassed in a common structure that would learn from the lessons of different experiences and methods in order to offer the university a transparent hierarchy of quality modalities for all to use.

C. The Bologna process and study programmes

Curricular reform has been mentioned in several units as a way to reduce the professors' teaching load as well as the students' workload by increasing the relevance of the learning process – more time for student self-study -thus creating a much more student-centred university. The Bologna process represents an opportunity to encourage such a transformation throughout the institution. This is also possible at EMU, as there is never 'exclusion from the Bologna process' and each institution is free to adopt and adapt the Bologna recommendations to its own activities. In North Cyprus, however, the 2005 Statute for HE indicates in its Chapter 5 that the ***duties*** of higher education institutions include harmonisation with the European Higher Education Area due for 2010 in accordance with the Bologna Process, thus making the arrangements that can lead to such an harmonisation a priority. EMU would like this commitment to be recognised by a Bologna charter. Yet, it can already happen, for instance, in the validation of its programmes, by taking as a basis the ECTS norm of ***30 credits per semester or 60 per academic year***, a norm based on workload rather than contact hours. Indeed, EMU should ***reduce the number of contact hours for teaching***, thus lowering the student workload and also creating some 'free space' for the teachers, time to be dedicated, for instance, to research activities. This implies that, should EMU wish to be competitive in the future EHEA, its educational philosophy must change. It is thus recommended that EMU increase its focus on learning while reducing its teaching: this implies great attention being given to the ***definition of the learning processes leading to specific learning outcomes*** of possible interest for future employers.

In the interests of transparency, the ***Diploma supplement*** already mentioned in the 1999 ministerial declaration should become routine procedure at EMU as soon as possible, all the more so as it is an important element for participating in the European Higher Education Area. The development of ***interdisciplinary programmes between faculties*** must go beyond the mere sharing of electives – much too marginal a cooperation. The Bologna process offers universities new opportunities to further genuine inter-faculty collaboration by developing new ***interdisciplinary Masters programmes***, a chance for building a community of belonging that EMU should not forego. Bologna also stresses the importance of ***distance education and e-learning***: using such tools for training could alleviate EMU's problems with the rapid increase of student numbers it has witnessed over the last few years. Such a policy could and should play a key role in developing a lifelong learning culture at EMU and in the region.

D. Research

Considering EMU's limited resources to face the challenge of globalisation or to meet the needs of the Lisbon objectives on the development of a vibrant society of knowledge in Europe, the review team considers it to be especially important for EMU to develop a

university-wide research policy. Research objectives should be part of the university strategic plan, thus defining the areas where research efforts should be concentrated. This would mean a clear set of priorities that should also take into account ***the modalities by which research cross-fertilises the educational process***.

Such priorities should be based on ***EMU's own expertise, criteria and needs*.** The university can count on many distinguished professors who have gained experience abroad at top quality institutions and publish in high-level international journals. EMU should help develop synergies between the members of that pool of experts by fostering ***collaboration between different departments*** in order to engineer a critical mass in research focused on priority areas, whose strength could be reinforced by ***targeted recruitment of new research collaborators*** with the support of central administration in so far as these priorities underline the specificity of the institution's profile of activities.

The project of ***performance-based rewards*** -a policy that should not affect research workers only - should be revitalised and implemented across the University. Indeed, in terms of resources for research, EMU does not live up to its expectations when it allocates to R&D 1% of the yearly fees (or 0,6% of its total budget). On a small budget, this is already a sign of commitment. However, the University should take a ***more active role in acquiring research funds from abroad***. For instance, it could ask for European support through the ***7th Framework Programme*** since, to quote an official document of the EU, *'researchers and organisations from countries other than Member States, candidate countries, or associated states may also participate in projects on a case-by-case basis'*. To help researchers to prepare their projects technically, it is recommended that the EMU leadership widen the scope of the existing *7th Framework Project Development Office* to all types of research, thus turning it into some kind of ***Centre for International Projects*.**

The creation of a ***Research Newsletter*** to spread information fast throughout EMU is a welcome operation. It could be completed by a ***small series of specialised research journals*** that could be published regularly with contributions from most Faculties with ***external reviewers*** validating all publications.

The review team believes that ***supporting young researchers*** is an essential tool to renew the blood of the university through high quality young people the University can benefit from. EMU's proportion of PhD students (1,6% of all of its students) is however well below one that could offer a critical mass for long-term action. A scheme of seed money for research exists at EMU but it targets the teaching staff only. The review team recommends ***improving the University's research support scheme by extending it to young researchers especially*,** for instance by setting up a university internal research grant system.

E. Financing and revenue streams

Since public authorities are not investing in EMU as a state institution, although it is the oldest and biggest university in Cyprus, the university should count on income brought in by extension and fund-raising activities. Neither the self-evaluation report, nor required additional documents have provided the EUA visitors with a plan showing how to control a situation of virtual bankruptcy – even if the government would never let down EMU as an institution. To live under the pressure of constant deficit is de-motivating, to say the least. The hope for state subsidies is not very helpful. The EUA team would thus recommend that EMU elaborates a ***financial crisis plan*** envisaging the measures to avoid too risky a situation.

Since the Rectorate collects ***all tuition fees***, an agreed system should operate across the University as a whole. It should determine ***the percentage both the faculty and the common university budgets should receive from earned income*.** Set rules could stimulate Faculties to be more active in the search for money or for the efficiency of its use. The system

should also apply to continuing education, distance learning, e-learning or any paid activities that the faculties are performing as extension work.

According to the Statute for Higher Education, No. 65/2005, Chapter 9, some encouragement is provided by the State to facilitate outside investment in universities (exemption from taxes, stamps, fees or duties). This should create a welcome space for ***donations from outside*** the university. It is recommended that the university leadership not only launch a ***country-wide campaign*** to raise funds from people and firms in North Cyprus but also to ***contact its alumni*** (especially in Turkey), using the EMU Alumni centres that have been already set up in those countries interested in sending students to EMU.

As good research can also bring contract money and grants, the University should considerably increase its ***efforts in the field of project activities*** in order to obtain additional means, particularly from European resources.

The EUA team wonders whether EMU, as a former Higher Technological Institute, has developed a ***policy for the protection of intellectual property rights*** and if it monitors the patents university results may lead to and how it protects such intellectual property. But this may seem secondary compared to the needs the system has to meet. ***Scarcity*** represents a heavy external constraint. This could be soon be a thing of the past if the State were to pay the compensation it is supposed to in order to subsidise the study fees of Northern Cypriots. Any delay in this payment puts EMU under constant pressure, a dire fact if one remembers that ***any institution is as autonomous and free as its financial autonomy and financial freedom.***

F. University governance and the role of students

According to the 2005 Statute for Higher education, Chapter 2, ***'academic freedom and institutional autonomy have the highest priority'***.

The EUA team wonders how this fits with the role the ***Board of Trustees*** has taken over the last few years, reducing the competences of the rector and elected academic authorities to a shadow of influences by the constant interventions that are supposed to control the legality of financial management. In fact, such interventions equate to the micro-management of EMU by non-academics with little professional understanding of the institution. In other European countries this would amount to ***interference with the institution's autonomy*** that is under the Rector's responsibility. Indeed, the main role of a Board of Trustees is to ensure appropriate conditions for university development, in particular by raising funds, public and private. It is certainly not that of making up for the lack of these funds by controlling every penny of the money the university has earned mainly through fees and, in so doing, intruding into the everyday executive life of the University.

The ***role of students in University governance***, according to the team's views, does not match one of the main targets in the Bologna process: '***students and staff should act as full partners in the governance of higher education'***. The review team understands that the participation of students in University decision-making bodies is being increased to some 10% -from a symbolic number, at present. However, to favour full participation and informed voting rights**, *the student culture in such organs should move from passivity to commitmen*t**, throughout EMU, since all decisions affect students in a way or another. University politics are no simple game however. The leadership of EMU will have to ***inform students fully*** so that their new role becomes routine.

G. International relations

A crucial point of the Bologna declaration calls for the wide ***mobility of staff and students*** to encourage the European dimension of university education. The review team

noted that at EMU, as a result of political isolation, ***such activities are minimal*** (some visiting professors and the students coming and returning home excepted). Anyway, short conference trips cannot be compared with longer-term teaching, research or study activities abroad. Despite some embargo measures at the level of North Cyprus, the university would be well advised to have a ***strategic plan for international relations***. This could mean ***revisiting the some 80 agreements*** EMU has signed with universities around the world, reviewing in particular their mobility clauses. Anyway, here too, EMU should give ***priority to European relations*** in order to end its partial isolation, for instance by using the network of the some 700 universities that are members of EUA. The accession of Cyprus – as a whole -to the European Union, means the possibility of indirect participation in EU activities, at least at individual level.

H. Accreditation and Quality Assurance

The current quality assurance system is primarily based on the external evaluation and accreditation of programmes by YÖDAK, the North Cypriot Higher Education Council. EMU has had a strong interest in quality enhancement over the last few years and has started various processes leading to internal quality assessment. As a framework encompassing these many activities, the review team would recommend that EMU leadership adopt the ***Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area***, that, as a Bologna requirement, are an attempt to achieve the correct balance between external and internal quality assurance.

As said earlier, such a framework approach could become a transversal project for EMU as a whole, thus becoming a key point of the strategic plan. The review team would recommend that the ***quality assurance and quality enhancement system*** be primarily focussed on teaching, research and university administration.

Although EMU has an elaborated and ***anonymous evaluation system*** of teachers by students available through modern electronic means, the EUA team understand that its results are rarely used for management decisions or for quality development. Such efforts are meaningless, however, if they remain at the level of data gathering. They must lead to action, transparency and proper ***feedback to the students***.

Capacity for change and constraints: concluding remarks

Considering the heavy constraints analysed in the first part of the report (small size of the supporting community, isolation, heavy dependence on fees and on Turkey, etc.), EMU's existence could be at risk. To face such dangers, the university needs to adapt and change.

Rector Güven seized the opportunity of political change to launch an ambitious revival process for the university. Political vagaries, however, slowed down the transformation and undermined the motivation for change. Anyway, ***implementation of change*** is usually the most difficult part of any revitalisation process in any type of institution. It is definitely easier when the members of the institution accept change as normal development.

Therefore, the importance of optimal ***internal communication*** cannot be overemphasised. Change cannot be imposed from above, although sufficient control must be maintained so as to guide the process. Indeed, any university is more than the sum of its parts. This requires a ***good two-way communication*** accompanied by thorough consultation and constant feedback from all partners in order have clear reporting of achievements. In other words, generally accepted and agreed processes or rules must operate in a trusting, clear, frank and transparent way if disillusionment is to be avoided or, at least, minimised. This

interactive process nurtures the ***sense of belonging*** the university must achieve as a community if it is to survive all kinds of difficulties.

Over recent years, the Eastern Mediterranean University has proved it can adapt to new challenges in the fields of teaching, learning and research. The review team congratulates the University on its students. We met dozens of them and ***all were proud of their university***, several having chosen EMU for its recognised quality. From this point of view the review team believes that the University has a good future.

From the review process, the EUA team is confident that the University could successfully meet the challenges it is now facing despite a constantly changing environment. Thus ***EMU´s efforts to internationalise the university, to participate fully in the European Higher Education Area, the Erasmus and 7th Framework programmes while obtaining international funding, should be commended***.

The process is on-going, with all its ups and downs. To make it sustainable, however, the institution must distance itself from shortsighted problems and initiatives. To do so, EMU can keep to the goal defined by its present rector: '**to *become the star institution of the Eastern Mediterranean region***, a knowledge centre whose light will be seen in Europe and internationally'. Although ambitious, these words can motivate the institution to prove its 'passion for quality', thus justifying a growing optimism despite formidable constraints. The latter could be alleviated – in Cyprus or beyond – when universities, for the sake of their students, do not become the pawns of international politics or the hostages of internal dissensions. Thus their autonomy and the freedom to enquire of their members, staff and students can be secured. Thus can they also become true partners in the development of their community, be it small, like in North Cyprus, or much larger, like the Eastern Mediterranean region, both areas being complementary dimensions for the possible scope of EMU's contribution to the peace and wealth of the region, a reality that transcends the old and new walls of Famagusta.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title: "Implementing a Constructivist Approach into Online Course Designs in Distance Education Institute at Eastern Mediterranean University".

Introduction:
This research aims to create awareness of decision making process based on team work and investigate the role of course design in developing critical thinking skills of the online students in Distance Education Institute Program and Courses. This can be achieved through the following objectives:

- To create the awareness of the Distance Education Institute members on decision making process based on team work
- To create awareness of team work inspiration and the significant of the constructivist approach in online education by the training
- To integrate constructivist approach into online course designs for developing critical thinking skills of online students
- To contribute organizational change in terms of the instructional design within distance education

Information about Participants' Involvement in the Study
Participants accepting the invitation to take part in this research study will be involved in training, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus groups as data collection methods with their permission. The gathered data will be treated strictly. During the research process, researcher keeps research diary in order to be reflect every step of action implementation as insider researcher.

Benefits
This research project provides an action plan for the university that provides an insight into team work inspiration in decision making process for distance education practices. It grants organizational change to adapt new paradigm and approach in course designs based on constructivist approach in developing critical thinking skills of students. In other words, it may enable them to change the atmosphere of online instruction.

Risks
No serious risks to participants are anticipated. As mentioned above, all measure will be taken to assure confidentially and privacy. Participants may voluntarily withdraw from the study if they choose to do so.

Confidentiality
Data gathered in this study will be kept confidential. All the data will be stored in my residence. No participant shall be mentioned by name in any written or oral presentation of the findings. Pseudonyms will be used. If there is information that participant prefer to keep in confidence or information that might jeopardize confidentially, that information will be deleted from the data analysis.

Contact Information
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the worker researcher, Zehra Altinay at 0533 8400382 or zehra.altinay@emu.edu.tr.

Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: "Implementing a Constructivist Approach into Online Course Designs in Distance Education Institute at Eastern Mediterranean University".

Researcher's Name: Zehra Altinay

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part in research.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that data will be stored at the researcher's residence.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher if I require further information about the research, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed ……..(research participant)

Print name ……... **Date** ……

APPENDIX C

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus: Exploring the Team Inspiration of the Institute for Collaborative Decision Making Process in relation to Course Designs

1. What is your position in the Distance Education Institute?
2. How long have you been a member of Distance Education Institute?
3. Could you tell me about institutional activities for continuous quality improvement within institute?
4. Do members sufficiently become together to decide what assessments and interventions are needed for learner focused education regarding to online course designs? How?
5. How could you define team work?
6. Could you describe team work activities in your institute?
7. What do you think about the role of team work in designing courses?
8. Could you describe decision making process in designing online courses?
9. What do you think about the advantages of being in team work in designing online courses?

APPENDIX D

TRAININGS

TRAINING I: TEAMWORK

Step 1: What is team work?

"a group of individuals working together in which the success of any individual is dependent on the success of the entire group" (Lanza, 1985).

"collections of people who must rely on group collaboration if each member is to experience the optimum sense of success and goal achievement (Badu, 2002).

Teams need to learn how to develop knowledge, share information, and build on each other's knowledge to create new knowledge and new models, rather than simply adapt the models already existing (Yeh *et al.,* 2006).

Step 2: How do members work together in decision making process for course designs?

Team is an important means in organizational change and continuous improvement within innovation activities. It provides organizational performance through involvement, learning, interaction (Castka *et al.,* 2003).

Knowledge sharing among team members has been found to be a prerequisite for successful collaborative teamwork (Leinonen and Bluemink, 2008).

As there are many types of teams, and Huszczo (1990) describes some of them that are:

- committees
- task forces
- quality circles employee-participation
- groups
- joint union-management
- leadership teams
- action committee
- project teams
- supervisory council and
- autonomous or self-directed work teams

In respect to team working in higher education program development, project teams are the popular to change and develop the program designs based on collaboration and committed decision making process. Teams need to cover these components: inter-team, team member strengths and skills, communication, roles and interdependence, clarity of team goals, decision-making and leadership, organizational support. In relation to these components, team members maintain their distinguished roles within the work groups and one of the members can take dual role as trainer and the mentor within the project teams.

Team members need to know the following dimensions of the team work to implement in their project teams based on the awareness of team work culture. These dimensions and their distinctive features also provide group and self-evaluation to explore team inspiration within institute and thereby understand the necessity of project teams for change and development.

Team Work Dimensions:

A. Customer and Inter-team Issues

1. Examining clients' satisfaction
2. Developing services without any advice from people outside of the team.
3. Working hard to maintain constructive relationships with other teams involved with clients.
4. Allowing clients to decide what assessments and interventions are needed.
5. Getting to know the people working on other teams even those within our organization.

B. Roles and Interdependence

1. Sharing knowledge and skills easily.
2. Developing care-plans independent of everyone else
3. Understanding one another's roles
4. Coordinating efforts
5. Collaborating rather than competing with each other

C. Communication and Conflict Management

1. Listening each other within the team
2. When conflicts arise team members negotiate solutions easily

D. Team Member Skills

1. Knowing how to get things done in this team
2. Knowing how to run a meeting efficiently
3. Training in technical discipline
4. Adjusting to change within team

E. Clarity of Team Goals

1. Defining clear goals, objectives
2. Planning for future
3. Changing priorities on team
4. Understanding the goal of continuous quality improvement
5. Examining what the team do, how it works and how to improve it
6. Having clear agenda on team meetings

F. Decisions authority and accountability

1. Making good decisions in difficult situations
2. Understanding how the team makes the decisions it does
3. Having unclear authority within team

G. Support from Organisation

1. Getting resources that are needed
2. Considering workloads
3. Appreciation of work by leader

References

Castka, P, Sharp, M, J, & Bamber, C, J, 2003, 'Assessing team development to improve organizational performance', *Measuring Business Excellence*, 7, **4**, pp 29-36.

Leinonen, P, & Bluemink, J, 2008, 'The distributed team members' explanations of knowledge they assume to be shared', *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 20, **1**, pp 38-53.

TRAINING II: HOW TO PREPARE AND DESIGN ONLINE COURSE BASED ON CONSTRUCTIVIST APPRACH

A. What is Constructivism?

Constructivism is a theory of learning that has roots in both philosophy and psychology. The essential core of constructivism is that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Steffe and Gale, 1995; Fosnot, 1996).

1. Knowledge is not passively accumulated, but rather, is the result of active cognizing by the individual
2. Cognition is an adaptive process that functions to make an individual's behavior more viable given a particular environment
3. Cognition organizes and makes sense of one's experience, and is not a process to render an accurate representation of reality and
4. Knowing has roots in both biological/neurological construction, and social, cultural, and language based interactions

Constructivism is not a solitary theory but rather a perspective that exists along a continuum with three broad categories: cognitive constructivism, social constructivism and radical constructivism (Doolittle, 1997). Cognitive constructivism focuses on the construction of knowledge with information processing and the learner playing a central role (Clark, 1999). Social constructivism views all knowledge as socially constructed through interactions with other individuals and the environment and maintains an emphasis on language use (Kim, 2001). Radical constructivism posits that the individual constructs knowledge based on his or her own experiences and may not be a true representation of external reality as all experiences are subjective (vonGlasersfeld, 1995). Although these categories of constructivism have significant differences, they share the basic premise of constructivism: learners actively construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences.

This position is exemplified by Bakhtin (1984), "truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction".

Traditional Classroom	Constructivist Classroom
Curriculum begins with the parts of the whole. Emphasizes basic skills.	Curriculum emphasizes big concepts, beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts.
Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.	Pursuit of student questions and interests is valued.
Materials are primarily textbooks and workbooks.	Materials include primary sources of material and manipulative materials.
Learning is based on repetition.	Learning is interactive, building on what the student already knows.
Teachers disseminate information to students, students are recipients of knowledge.	Teachers have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge.
Teacher's role is directive, rooted in authority.	Teacher's role is interactive, rooted in negotiation.
Assessment is through testing, correct answers.	Assessment includes student works, observations, and points of view, as well as tests. Process is as important as product.
Knowledge is seen as inert.	Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever changing with our experiences.
Students work primarily alone.	Students work primarily in groups.

B. What are the benefits of constructivism?

1. Benefit

Students learn more, and enjoy learning more when they are actively involved, rather than passive listeners.

2. Benefit

Education works best when it concentrates on thinking and understanding, rather than on rote memorization. Constructivism concentrates on learning how to think and understand.

3. Benefit

Constructivist learning is transferable. In constructivist online classrooms, students create organizing principles that they can take with them to other learning settings.

4. Benefit

Constructivism gives students ownership of what they learn, since learning is based on students' questions and explorations, and often the students have a hand in designing the assessments as well. Constructivist assessment engages the students' initiatives and personal investments in their journals, research reports, physical models, and artistic representations. Engaging the creative instincts develops students' abilities to express knowledge through a variety of ways. The students are also more likely to retain and transfer the new knowledge to real life.

5. Benefit

By grounding learning activities in an authentic, real-world context, constructivism stimulates and engages students. Students in constructivist classrooms learn to question things and to apply their natural curiosity to the world.

6. Benefit

Constructivism promotes social and communication skills by creating a classroom environment that emphasizes collaboration and exchange of ideas. Students must learn how to articulate their ideas clearly as well as to collaborate on tasks effectively by sharing in group projects. Students must therefore exchange ideas and so must learn to "negotiate" with others and to evaluate their contributions in a socially acceptable manner. This is essential to success in the real world, since they will always be exposed to a variety of experiences in which they will have to cooperate and navigate among the ideas of others.

C. Constructivist Pedagogy- Set of core design principles

1. Learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments.
2. Learning should involve social negotiation and mediation.
3. Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner.
4. Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge.
5. Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences.
6. Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and selfaware.
7. Teachers serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors.
8. Teachers should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.

D. How does constructivist based online course design operate?

In relation to above core design principles, there is intensified need to consider following tools and functions.

1. Virtual reality
2. Email, discussions, teleconferencing
3. Relevant topic, skill, process
4. Self-check
5. Adult learners, self-discipline (orientation to online education)
6. Direct instruction
7. Diverse work, topic helps to gain multiple perspectives.

Suggested Material: Developing portfolio

Constructivist teachers encourage students to constantly assess how the activity is helping them gain understanding. By questioning themselves and their strategies, students in the constructivist classroom ideally become "expert learners." This gives them ever-broadening tools to keep learning. With a well-planned classroom environment, the students learn HOW TO LEARN.

You might look at it as a spiral. When they continuously reflect on their experiences, students find their ideas gaining in complexity and power, and they develop increasingly strong abilities to integrate new information. One of the teacher's main roles becomes to encourage this learning and reflection process.

E. Constructivist learning intervention

1. The nature of the learner

a. The learner as a unique individual

Social constructivism views each learner as a unique individual with unique needs and backgrounds. The learner is also seen as complex and multidimensional. Social constructivism not only acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of the learner, but actually encourages, utilizes and rewards it as an integral part of the learning process (Wertsch, 1997).

b. The importance of the background and culture of the learner

Social constructivism encourages the learner to arrive at his or her own version of the truth, influenced by his or her background, culture or embedded worldview. From the social constructivist viewpoint, it is thus important to take into account the background and culture of the learner throughout the learning process, as this background also helps to shape the knowledge and truth that the learner creates, discovers and attains in the learning process (Wertsch,1997).

c. The responsibility for learning

Furthermore, it is argued that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner (Von Glasersfeld, 1989). Social constructivism thus emphasizes the importance of the learner being actively involved in the learning process, unlike previous educational viewpoints where the responsibility rested with the instructor to teach and where the learner played a passive, receptive role. Von Glasersfeld (1989) emphasizes that learners construct their own understanding and that they do not simply mirror and reflect what they read.

d. The motivation for learning

According to Von Glasersfeld (1989), sustaining motivation to learn is strongly dependent on the learner's confidence in his or her potential for learning. These feelings of competence and belief in potential to solve new problems, are derived from first-hand experience of mastery of problems in the past and are much more powerful than any external acknowledgment and motivation (Prawat and Floden 1994).

2. The role of the instructor

Instructors as facilitators

According to the social constructivist approach, instructors have to adapt to the role of facilitators and not teachers (Bauersfeld, 1995). The learning environment should also be designed to support and challenge the learner's thinking (Di Vesta, 1987).

3. Nature of learning process

a. Learning is an active, social process

Social constructivist scholars view learning as an active process where learners should learn to discover principles, concepts and facts for themselves, hence the importance of encouraging guesswork and intuitive thinking in learners (Brown *et al.,*1989; Ackerman 1996).

b. Dynamic interaction between task, instructor and learner

A further characteristic of the role of the facilitator in the social constructivist viewpoint, is that the instructor and the learners are equally involved in learning from each other as well (Holt and Willard-Holt 2000). This means that the learning experience is both subjective and objective and requires that the instructor's culture, values and background become an essential part of the interplay between learners and tasks in the shaping of meaning.

c. Collaboration among learners

Learners with different skills and backgrounds should collaborate in tasks and discussions in order to arrive at a shared understanding of the truth in a specific field (Duffy and Jonassen 1992).

Most social constructivist models, such as that proposed by Duffy and Jonassen (1992), also stress the need for collaboration among learners, in direct contradiction to traditional competitive approaches.

d. The importance of context

The social constructivist paradigm views the context in which the learning occurs as central to the learning itself (McMahon, 1997).

e. Assessment

Holt and Willard-Holt (2000) emphasize the concept of dynamic assessment, which is a way of assessing the true potential of learners that differs significantly from conventional tests. Here the essentially interactive nature of learning is extended to the process of assessment. Rather than viewing assessment as a process carried out by one person, such as an instructor, it is seen as a two-way process involving interaction between both instructor and learner.

4. The selection, scope and sequencing of the subject matter

a. Knowledge should be discovered as an integrated whole

Knowledge should not be divided into different subjects or compartments, but should be discovered as an integrated whole (Di Vesta, 1987; McMahon, 1997).

This also again underlines the importance of the context in which learning is presented (Brown *et al.,* 1989). The world, in which the learner needs to operate, does not approach one in the form of different subjects, but as a complex myriad of facts, problems, dimensions and perceptions (Ackerman, 1996).

b. Engaging and challenging the learner

Learners should constantly be challenged with tasks that refer to skills and knowledge just beyond their current level of mastery. This will capture their motivation and build on previous successes in order to enhance the confidence of the learner (Brownstein, 2001).

c. The structuredness of the learning process

It is important to achieve the right balance between the degree of structure and flexibility that is built into the learning process. Savery (1994) contends that the more structured the learning environment, the harder it is for the learners to construct meaning based on their conceptual understandings. A facilitator should structure the learning experience just enough to make sure that the students get clear guidance and parameters within which to achieve the learning objectives, yet the learning experience should be open and free enough to allow for the learners to discover, enjoy, interact and arrive at their own, socially verified version of truth.

Summary

Constructivism and Online Education (Doolittle, 1999)

Constructivism posits that knowledge acquisition occurs amid four assumptions:
1. Learning involves active **cognitive** processing.
2. Learning is adaptive.
3. Learning is subjective, not objective.
4. Learning involves both **social**/cultural and individual processes.

These four assumptions have led, indirectly, to eight primary pedagogical recommendations:
1. Learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments.
2. Learning should involve **social** negotiation and mediation.
3. Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner.
4. Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge.
5. Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences.
6. Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware.
7. Teachers serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors.
8. Teachers should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.

The question then arises, can an online medium support this pedagogy that is based on the constructivist assumptions. Below, each of the eight pedagogical statements is briefly addressed based on this question and a "grade" is given to reflect online education's ability to meet or implement these statements.

1. **Learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments.**
If authenticity were examined as an either/or proposition, then online education would fail miserably, however, authenticity is more a matter of degree than constitution. From this perspective, online education is potentially quite effective in providing virtual environments in which one can simulate real-world events. In order for online education to adequately satisfy this pedagogical statement the online environment must provide complex, culturally relevant, ill-structured domains within which the user can operate and "live." The use of virtual reality, simulators, and microworlds has focused on this concept. (Grade: A)

2. **Learning should involve social negotiation and mediation.**
Online education provides a unique opportunity for students to engage in **social** negotiation and mediation, unfortunately, until recently, **social** negotiation and mediation were constrained in the online medium. The use of both asynchronous (e.g., email, threaded discussions, listservs) and synchronous (e.g., MOOs, MUDs, IRCs, video teleconferencing) online communications allows for **social** negotiation and mediation to occur across both time and distance. (Grade: A)

3. **Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner.**
Online education is capable of making vast amounts of very diverse information, knowledge, and skills available to the learner. In this sense, online education is quite capable of providing relevance as long as the learner is able to self-select a relevant topic, process, or skill. Where online education may have difficulty is in spontaneously adapting instruction to a change in student perspective. In a face-to-face meeting, when a student asks a question such as "How does this concept relate to my interest?" the teacher is able to adjusting the next response to the clearly fit the student's query, however, most online education interfaces are not flexible enough to handle this type of tailoring. This type of immediate tailoring is more available through synchronous than asynchronous environments. (Grade: B)

4. **Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge**.
This pedagogical statement is perhaps the most difficult for online education to handle. To address this statement requires a transaction to occur between the user and the online educational environment. In a synchronous environment mediated by an instructor, student's prior knowledge may be probed at the beginning of instruction and instruction may then be adjusted based on the feedback from the student, however, in an asynchronous environment, this type of probing and responding is less fluid and flexible. (Grade: C)

5. **Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences.**
While online environments are capable of frequently assessing students during instruction, difficulty arises in using this formative assessment to guide further instruction. The reason for assessing students formatively is to make adjustments to instruction that take into account the student's currently level of understanding. Instructors will often provide students with "self-check" quizzes that assess students during various parts of instruction, however, the use of these quizzes is usually marginal, providing feedback to students so that students have a better understanding of their learning. Rarely is this knowledge used to alter subsequent instruction. (Grade: C)

6. **Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware.**
In most online education environments, self-regulation, self-mediation, and self-awareness are requirements for successfully engaging in that environment. Online education typically requires students to be more involved and more persistent relative to the educational environment. One aspect of online education that is currently lacking is educating the student in the processes necessary to successfully engage in online education. Students often begin an online educational experience with no instruction concerning how online education differs from tradition classroom education. This pedagogical statement is attainable, but is currently not being addressed adequately. (Grade: C).

7. **Teachers serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors.** While it is still possible for instructors to lecture and to use direct instruction during an online educational experience, it is not nearly as easy as it is when one is teaching in a classroom. As a result, one is likely to find less "instructing" and more guiding and facilitating in online education. In addition, online education can be effectively constructed to emphasize a facilitating role for instructors while students engage in simulations, web-based data collection, and ill-structured problem solving. The self-regulatory and self-mediated nature of online education promotes the instructor taking the role of guide or coach. (Grade: A)

8. **Teachers should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.**
Online education, especially with a diverse group of students, is ripe for the presentation and experience of multiple perspectives. Online education has easy access to international and culturally diverse resources, including diverse populations. With the passing of time, a greater amount of diverse articles (published and pre-published) and presentations are accessible online, providing students with the resources for multiple perspectives.
(Grade: A)

References

Ausburn, L, J, 2004, 'Design components most valued by adult learners in blended online education environments: an American perspective', *Educational Media International,* 41, **4**, pp 327-37.

Duffy, T, M, & Jonassen, D, H, 1991, 'Constructivism: new implications for instruction technology', *Educational Technology*, pp 7-12.

Edward, N, S, 2001, 'Evaluation of a constructivist approach to student induction in relation to students' learning styles', *EUR. J. ENG. ED*, 26, **4**, pp 429–40.

Elbaum, B, Mclntyre, C, & Smith, A, 2002, *Essential elements: Prepare, design, and teach your online course*, Madison: Atwood publishing.

Salmon, G, 2002, *E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning online,* London: Kogan Page.

APPENDIX E

FEEDBACK FORMS

The form aims to receive your evaluation and reflection on the trainings within action research process.

A. Training I: Team work and decision making process for the course designs

1. Could you provide your reflection and evaluation about the contributions of training on team work and decision making process for course designs?

2. Is there new knowledge for you in the training?

3. What you have learnt from the training?

4. How training provided insight to teamwork skills?

5. How training supports your knowledge in designing online course through teamwork?

B. Training II: Providing awareness of constructivist approach based course design for online tutors

1. Could you provide your reflection and evaluation about the contributions of training to you?

2. What do you think about the focus of the training?

3. Does training provide new knowledge to you? How?

4. How training provided insight to your online course design?

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus: Evaluating the Awareness of Online Tutors about Constructivist Approach

1. Which online course are you teaching?
2. Could you briefly explain online learning and teaching process of your course?
3. What strategies are you pursuing while designing your online course?
4. How could you define learner focused online course design?
5. Do you consider the cultural and individual differences of the students while designing your online course? How?
6. How could you describe your role in learning process of the online students?
7. What components of your course design motivate students to learn better?
8. What kind of tools do you use to communicate with students?
9. What kind of learning activities are you promoting in your course?
10. Do you believe that students take the responsibility of their learning process? How?
11. Do students involved in collaborative works? How?
12. Do you believe that your course design proposes students to think, reflect and understand on subjects, negotiate with others in order to transfer learning into real world experiences?
13. Do students engage with diverse projects or topics?
14. How do you asses students' performance in your course?

APPENDIX G

CHECKLIST TO ANALYZE COURSE DESIGNS OF ONLINE TUTORS BASED ON CRITERIA OF CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

	Criteria	Course Descriptions	Course Plans	Course Web Designs
01	There is an orientation to present web page.			
02	Students become actively engaged in their learning process.			
03	Students acquire pre-requisite knowledge on multimedia and design.			
04	Students use web-based authoring tools to develop projects.			
05	Students collaborate in teams.			
06	Teachers act as facilitator in learning process.			
07	Students use multimedia as a constructivist learning tool.			
08	There is the requirement of team work and collaboration.			
09	Students take their own responsibility.			
10	This framework requires reflection.			
11	Task based learning creates environment for shared cognition.			
12	Constructivist approach offers student participation.			
13	Collaborative study in the process and product of collaboration supports skills development.			
14	Constructivist based learning increases social interaction.			
15	Individual characteristics such as motivation, attitude, preparation, learning style, gender of learners are taken into account.			
16	Learning is collaborative.			
17	Learning is socially constructed.			
18	Learning is active.			
19	Learning process is goal free evaluation.			
20	Learning is based on problem solving and experiential process.			
21	Course design should fit to the curriculum.			
22	Course design is learner-focused.			
23	Course is designed for small group size.			
24	Course design is situated to the culture.			
25	Assessment requires process not product.			
26	Comments			
27	Reflections			

References

Elbaum, B, Mclntyre, C, & Smith, A, 2002, *Essential elements: Prepare, design, and teach your online course*, Madison: Atwood publishing.

Salmon, G, 2002, *E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning online,* London: Kogan Page.

APPENDIX H

GROUP INTERVIEWING (FOCUS GROUP) QUESTIONS

Focus: Adaptation Process

1. What helped or hindered you in implementing constructivist approach into course design?
2. What do you think about initial impact of constructivist based course design on learning and skills development of the students?
3. How do you describe the advantages of action learning process for your professional growth?

APPENDIX I

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS

Focus: Investigating the Changes on Teaching Philosophy of Tutors and Examining Skills Development of Online Students

1. Do you believe that online learning environment has proposed authentic and real-world experiences for students? How?
2. How did online learning environment provide opportunity for students to involve in social negotiation and mediation?
3. Were students encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware for their learning process? How?
4. How could you define your role as constructivist teacher in learning and teaching process?
5. Do you believe that your course has been encouraged students to have multiple perspectives with studying diverse topics? How?
6. Could you tell me the skills that students were gained through discussion with peers within group works?
7. Do you believe that students were gained reflection, reasoning skills as a result of this course? Why?
8. How did you asses the performance of the students?
9. Which components of the course design foster/limit skills development of the students?
10. Which skills of the students were developed by constructivist based course design?
11. Which skills of the students were limited by constructivist based course design?

APPENDIX J

SELF-REPORT BASED ON SCALING TO ONLINE STUDENTS IN SETTING THEIR SKILLS

Management of Self (Personal Effectiveness)	**None**	**Low**	**Adequate**	**High**	**Comments**
Manage time effectively					
Set objectives, priorities and standards					
Take responsibility for own learning					
Use a range of academic skills					
Develop and adapt learning strategies					
Show intellectual flexibility					
Use learning in new or different situations					
Plan/work towards long-term goals					
Purposefully reflect on own learning					
Clarify with criticism constructively					
Cope with stress					
Management of Others (Team Work)					
Carry out agreed tasks					
Respect the views and values of others					
Work productively in a cooperative context					
Adapt to the needs of the group					
Defend/justify views and actions					
Take initiative and lead others					
Delegate and stand back					
Negotiate					
Offer constructive criticism					
Take the role of chairperson					
Learn in a collaborative context					
Assist/support others in learning					
Management of Information (Includes Communication Skills)					
Use appropriate sources of information					
Use appropriate technologies					
Use appropriate media					
Handle large amounts of information					
Use appropriate language and form					
Present information competently					
Respond to different purposes/contexts and audiences					
Use information critically					
Use information in innovative and creative way					
Management of Task (Research management)					
Identify key features					
Conceptualize ideas					
Set and maintain priorities					
Identify strategic options					
Plan/implement a course of action					
Organize sub-tasks					
Use and develop appropriate strategies					
Assess outcomes					

Reference: Bennett, N, Dunne, E. and Carre, C. (1999) Patterns of core and generic skill provision in higher education. *Higher Education*, **37**(1), 71-93.

APPENDIX K

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus: Investigating the Role of Constructivist Approach based Course Designs in Developing Skills of Students

1. Which online course did you pursue for this semester?
2. What do you think about your online learning experience?
3. Could you compare the differences between traditional learning and online learning processes?
4. Which components of the course design motivates you to learn better?
5. Did you find a link between the course content and real life experiences during the course?
6. Could you describe your responsibilities as a student in your online course?
7. Could you also describe your tutor responsibilities in the online course?
8. Have you involved in studying diverse course contents during the course? How?
9. Which skills do you believe that your online course provides you to develop?
10. Which skills do you believe that your online course limits to develop?
11. How did your online course design foster your reflection, reasoning skills?
12. How was your performance assessed during your online learning process?

APPENDIX L

FEEDBACK FORM ABOUT PROJECT EVALUATION

"Evaluation on Efficiency of Research Project"

Research Title: Implementing Constructivist Approach into Online Course Designs in Distance Education Institute at Eastern Mediterranean University

This form aims to receive your evaluation and reflection on the practice of the constructivist approach in your online course based on the handbook's guideline. In other words, this form aims to receive your evaluation and reflection on the efficiency of the work-based research project.

1. Are you satisfied to be involved in this work-based project, do you believe that it is sufficient to develop institutional working practice and online course design based on constructivist approach?

…….Yes ……No

2. Could you report the beneficial outcomes of the research for institutional development?

3. Could you state the contributions of the action research process to your professional knowledge and experience?

4. What are the benefits of the constructivist pedagogy to your students and you as online tutor?

APPENDIX M

ABBREVIATIONS

EMU- Eastern Mediterranean University

EUA- European Universities Association

DProf- Doctorate of Professional Studies

EVIDENCES OF ACHIEVEMENT

LIST OF EVIDENCES

Handbook

Conference Participation

Published Paper

Press Releases

Official Letters

Certificate of Participants